

**Inventing Women: The Black Female Voice in the Post-Apartheid  
Writings of Farida Karodia**

**By**

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fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of  
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### **Declaration**

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university.

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We confirm that the work reported in this Thesis was carried out by the candidate under our supervision:

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## **Dedication**

To:

My three daughters; Jambi, Nicola and Mimi:

I'm so glad you saw me go through this because now you will understand what you have to do when I pass on the baton.

My husband; Mutahi:

There is no experience we haven't been able to share and this one is special because it heralds the beginning of the second half of life.

And

My parents; Ernest and Ludiah Lang'at:

From you I received the baton and you have waited in all encouragement for its conclusion. To you both I am grateful that I can say "It is done".

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the voice of the South African woman writer, Farida Karodia, as she writes in the post apartheid era. Specifically, it analyzes the writer's language as it gives voice to the black woman's revelation of self as she transforms silence into visibility and action. To do this, this study uses Karodia's post apartheid novels and short stories to derive contextual evidence of historical silencing and identify the distinctive language employed to voice the unique oppressions of race, class and gender endured by the black woman. Our theoretical framework combines the strategies of a Womanist perspective and Interactionism. Womanist theory allows us to interrogate the writers' premises and assumptions of the black woman on self and community while interaction theory gives us a chance to link women's interactions with the process of meaning construction and invention. Karodia not only attempts to define the nature of the contemporary black female voice but also invents a black woman through her distinctive choices of characters, worldview, use of conflict and union. She also uses language as inventive in its depiction of women's existence and shows their circumstances as evolving in nature with their ability to transform realities. The transformation for women occurs, we revealed, when women gives expression to conversial ideas, accept and learn to live with paradoxes, claim the situation, hence getting liberated by new perspectives and they are open to new understandings of their experiences. Also, the acknowledgement of their personal strengths and weaknesses allows for insight that leads to new awareness for women's progress.

## Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Abstract	vi
Table of Contents	vii
Definition of Key Terms	ix
<b>1.0 CHAPTER ONE: CRITICAL FOUNDATIONS: MAPPING THE INVENTION OF WOMEN</b>	1
1.1 Background of the study	1
1.2 Inventing Woman	3
1.3 Background to the Problem	4
1.4 Statement of the Problem	7
1.5 Objectives of the Study	8
1.6 Research Questions	9
1.7 Research Premises	9
1.8 Justification of the study	9
1.9 Literature Review	13
1.10 Theoretical Framework	20
1.11 Methodology	26
1.12 Scope and Delimitations	27
<b>2.0 CHAPTER TWO: GIVING CONTEXT TO VOICE</b>	29
2.1 Introduction	29
2.2. Invention and the Developing of Thought	30
2.3 Inventing in Defiance	32
2.4 Giving Context to Content	35
2.5 The Nature of Defiance	40
2.6 Alternative perspectives	44
2.7 Contemporary Literature and Historical Past	45
2.8 Afrindian Context	50
2.9 Invention and the feminine style	52
2.10 Chapter Summary	53
<b>3.0 CHAPTER THREE: IDENTIFYING A DISTINCTIVE VOICE</b>	54
3.1 Introduction	54
3.2 New Perspectives, New Voices	55
3.3 Locating a Distinctive Post-apartheid Voice	57
3.4 Feminine Conditions, Feminine Forms	61
3.5 An Assessment of Karodia's Voice	98

3.6	Chapter Summary	101
<b>4.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER FOUR: LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE</b>	102
4.1	Introduction	102
4.2	Need for Social Change	103
4.3	Feminist Discourse	106
4.4	Interaction	108
4.5	Breaking Women's Constraints	113
4.6	Double Binds	113
4.7	Paradoxes	121
4.8	An Assessment of Karodia's Language	127
4.9	Chapter Summary	128
<b>5.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	129
5.1	Summary	129
5.2	Conclusion	134
5.3	Recommendations for Further Research	135
	<b>WORKS CITED</b>	137



## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Invention**

Inventing of woman here is a twofold goal: it is about the construction of meaning through the “reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us.” (Lorde21) and secondly, it is the frightening act of self-revelation which allows for “the transformation of silence into language and action” and allows for “the visibility without which we cannot truly live.” (Lorde 21)

### **Black**

Under the Population Registration Act of 1950 the South African population was classified into four main groups: White, Indian, Coloured and Bantu (Ballard 2). The first order of division was the classification of all people as White and Black. Subsequently, those falling under the category of Black were subdivided into Indian, Coloured, and Bantu. (The category Bantu denoted what is commonly referred to as black people of African descent). The final division was of the Bantu into their various ethnicities. In this study, therefore, the term “Black” does not imply a fixed or biological concept of race but refers to the legacy of the social and political system of racial classification of apartheid that still permeates South African society.

**Voice**

It is a segment of the message and viewpoint that the writer desires to impart but more crucially it combines the author's ethnic, racial and/or social identification. Writers want their voices to be heard perceptibly in order for society to know what is happening in their area of the world from their particular ethnic, social or racial viewpoint. In literary analysis it includes the stylistic choices and language elements made by the artist for certain effects.

**Post apartheid**

This marks the era since 1994 when South Africa transitioned from the system of apartheid to one of majority rule. The election of 1994 resulted in a change in government with the African National Congress (ANC) coming to power.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CRITICAL FOUNDATIONS: MAPPING THE INVENTION OF WOMEN

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

The need for a socio-cultural re-definition is the essence of the post-apartheid struggle. In the case of the black South African woman, the privileging of voice becomes an opening for women whose voices have been unheard, marginalised and silenced. They were not able to speak of their failure as mothers to protect their own children against police harassment and the ravages of poverty. It was women as single parents and grandmothers who effectively headed households when fathers were unwilling or unable to take up the responsibility. Indeed, this was the spirit that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hoped to impart to the nation; an observation that resonates well with Fiona Ross when he argues that “the world is knowable only through words and that to have no voice is to be language-less, unable to communicate” (22).

Writing in the new democracy has its unique qualities and new challenges. The historical changes in the new political dispensation make it necessary for women to redefine and renegotiate their relationship with the state, their men-folk and with one another. In particular, a new socio-economic divide has arisen out of the states’ inability to provide basic rights such as clean water, sanitation, health-care, free education and affordable and safe housing for all. Many, many blacks remain unable to access a better lifestyle and are forced to endure the

consequences of the cycle of poverty. Some have argued that apartheid has evolved from “race” to “class” (22). Women who cannot speak out are seen as disempowered, unable to act and to effect change. Silence can be associated with powerlessness.

Women are thus positioned as a ‘muted’ group. The silence of women is the absence of women’s voices and their concerns from literature. This concurs with Kabeer’s observation that the search for empowerment has thus become a search for women’s voices and particularly so when women speak out against patriarchal authority.

This silencing occurred in patriarchal societies where the interests of women are rarely taken into account rendering the circumstances of black women’s lives as non-existent from mainstream literature. But this silence continues to be ominously present in the literature made available in schools and universities. As South African Universities are confronted by the difficulty of transforming their literature, the reality of the polarized society displays not just racial categories but also the uneven access and exclusion from educational institutions of the category ‘black women’s writing’. To this end, Brenda Nicholls concludes that “the challenge consists ... in instituting a Literature which ensures that Apartheid’s severities do not continue to have a final say” (18). For black feminist critics, the implications point to not only the invisibility of the literature but furthermore the potential misinterpretation of their writings, denying all black women a voice and an expressed worldview communicated on their terms.

In the South African literary context, the battle to achieve a voice is the singular challenge for black women. One of the subsidiary concerns of this study will be to give evidence that on a thematic and ideological level, they have a distinct contribution to make to the literary tradition. This study will give attention to overlooked and distorted experiences of women in the dominantly 'white' world – which denies a non-white reality - and the black male world that is incapable – for a variety of reasons - of hearing their narrative. In this respect, it seeks to challenge and expose the cultural norm of how women are supposed to think, feel and act and the distinction provided by black women writers such as Farida Karodia when expressing their thoughts and feelings. The concerns of this study include the submission that when we fail to listen to and for voices, we, as Gilligan points out, “become wedded to what within ourselves we know is a false story” about our social worlds” (59).

## **1.2 Inventing Woman**

As women have learned, social change is a slow process. Although the indomitable apartheid has been slain, whatever gains that were made for women were eroded and reduced to nothing by the material reality of their loss of a history and the denial of education. In their quest for subjectivity and voice, black women faced such new forms of resistance to their struggle. Women writers, consequently, had their role clearly defined for them; the need to use their artistry to invent women as a means of developing new ideas about them and creating

change. By using their skill to exploit available rhetorical resources, women writers – as evidenced in the African American slave tradition as well as the sprinkling of women’s apartheid narratives – were able to counter the prescriptions of ‘authorities’ and shape their own identities. Their boldness in writing themselves into history informs the spirit with which contemporary women writers present their worldview. Invention in this study has a second meaning which is how it transforms females into “women”, away from the cult of True Womanhood (Welter 76), which defined them as naturally pure, pious, domestic and submissive – constructions which silenced them and denied women personhood and citizenship.

In sum, this study will view invention as a key aspect in the undermining of the myths that uphold women’s inferiority and the belief systems that retard social change. Dale Spender historically saw that the writing act for women was in itself an act of defiance where a woman seeks to regain autonomy “to write was to be; it was to create and to exist. It was to construct a world view without interference from the “masters” (24). Certainly, through the process of invention, women writers must be understood as engaging in both a defensive and creative act.

### **1.3 Background to the Problem**

One central concern of this thesis is how feminist theory and criticism interfaces with feminism to influence literary critical method. Feminist criticism has served the role of broadening the literary canon by bringing literature by

African women to critical attention and steadily addressing the representation of African women in the various literatures. The methods used by such criticism in relation to African literatures, however, have and continue to evolve. Covering the broad period of the 1980s to the mid 1990s, articles on feminist literary thought in Africa examined the importance of feminism as a literary critical method as well as “the representation and misrepresentation of women in their social, political and economic milieus in literary texts.” (Verba 7) The question of the image of women as mothers, whores, representations of national pride, or as spiritual advisors and supporters was highly examined, but “never as individuals actively and crucially involved in political activity.” (Boehmer 18) With varied emphasis in the coverage, the analysis brought to focus questions of gender in representation as well as the past, present and future realities of life for women in Africa.

During that period and since then, feminist criticism has evolved in the methods used to address the new and emerging issues that afflict and confront the African woman. This has facilitated, as well as necessitated, the growing expansion of feminist approaches to include sociological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, historical and other approaches to broaden the examination of African literatures (Verba 9).

To examine South African literature as written by black women, theory is required that emphasizes history and personal experience and expresses the importance of the historical, political and social context of the literature. Though

South African theorists feel the urgency in the post apartheid moment to see their art form evolve away from the earlier literature of protest, for black women writers, as Barksdale ably argues that, “a literary act [must remain] a political act” (34).

### **1.3.1 The need for a black feminist criticism**

This lays stress on the critical need for Black women scholars to create their own paradigms and theoretical frameworks for assessing their writings. This will allow for improved interpretations of women’s works in an effort to keep them authentic and accurate while maintaining their originality and meaning.

While mainstream literary critics might fail to recognize and acknowledge the value of black women’s writings, a womanist perspective can describe the ways in which the writers’ circumstances affected their creativity while also analyzing the accomplishment. This is due to the shared conviction of critics that literature cannot be fully grasped without a consideration of the position of women and women writers in society, their views of the world, and their literary preferences and practices (Walzer 18). A womanist perspective, therefore, stands to add to and deepen our views of these writers, and substantially change our understanding of the worlds from which they write and the structure of literature in general.

Equally important, womanist theory also calls for a re-reading of past literatures. A womanist perspective cannot be divorced from earlier images of



black women as depicted in the literature. Historically, black women have been represented in literature and social science research in ways that appear to be authoritatively or empirically based. Such representations include black women as the invisible, passive Other, whereby women's creative and complex contributions to culture in Africa was ignored. More compassionate representations of black women categorize them among the oppressed but without deep considerations of the interlocking hierarchies that affect black women's lives. In this study of inventing woman, we seek to establish how black feminist criticism invents a language that depicts an emergent perspective of black women's experiences.

#### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

Black women have been repeatedly defined by others for their own ends. Because such constructions of womanhood silenced them, black women writers are now compelled to invent the spaces and roles in and the sites from which women's voices can be heard and heeded. In the recent past, black women writers have sought to make their voice heard in spite of restricting conditions. Their persistence against all odds ensured a level of visibility and a place in history. However, the nature of the post-apartheid voice and the spaces, roles and sites that it creates for black women has yet to be analyzed.

Thus, this study steers the analysis and reading of black women's narratives away from the politics of representation to the conceptual development

of a feminist reading that will give voice to that world and present a female reality. This empowering approach within feminist theory emphasises that the subject must see discourse as a means of positioning oneself (inclusion/exclusion) as well as potentially transforming the relation between margin and centre.

Consequently, this study assumes that as Karodia writes her fictional works, she invents woman; she also invents a language and discourse of her own. Hence, the study seeks to investigate how Karodia's narratives create an alternate discourse to give voice to the gendered constraints and class limitations facing the black woman. In this regard, the study seeks to demonstrate how language innovation can be used to express new social realities.

### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

The study strives to achieve the following set of objectives; to:

1. Examine the socio-cultural and historical position of the black woman that relate to her muted voice and creates space for inventing woman.
2. Identify the distinctive female conditions that inform Karodia's distinctive writing style.
3. Investigate how Karodia uses language to resist male domination and give women alternative means of expression.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

1. How did the black woman's socio-historical position render her invisible and create the need for a distinct voice?
2. How does Karodia distinguish the female conditions of her characters and how does her style reflect this?
3. How does Karodia create a female language that prompts self-revelation and transforms silence into visibility and action?

## **1.7 Research Premises**

The study is guided by the following premises:

1. A womanist approach to black women's writing must form the basis of discourse on cultural analysis.
2. Theory must be developed that leads to action and change on both domestic and African issues but in particular those issues affecting black women and other historically disenfranchised peoples.

## **1.8. Justification of the Study**

Writings by black women are gaining recognition and acclaim in a number of milieus, such as the academia. According to Rajendra Chetty the largely white academia had "...arrogantly posited a distorted conception of what literature is, how value should be appropriated and, more specifically, what constitutes South African cultural capital" (qtd. in Rav 25). Chetty brings this fact into play to

support why the academe is currently addressing the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge and African writers, “which is transforming from an elite, exclusive institution to embrace all the writings of the land.” (qtd in Rav, 26)

Nonetheless, it is still a deep-rooted truth that women’s words are not valued and oftentimes completely lost to dominant male voice. This study, centred on a feminist framework is justified on a number of points. Firstly, as South Africans readily acknowledge, they have lived for a very long time in the stifling isolation of their separate worlds as both individuals and groups. In fact Laurretta Ngcobo argues that, “Only now do we as South African and artists self-consciously group and reach out to find fellow South African kindred spirits” (1). Indeed, the experience of any artist is validated only by the knowledge that someone, somewhere is sharing in the emotion of their deepest feelings. With apartheid out of the way, this study aims to give a listening audience to intuitive statements of women that the author communicates.

Secondly, a study that investigates the voice of a black woman in the post apartheid period will add to the body of knowledge that challenges the norm of male-centred research and bring to the fore the significance of female experiences. Instead of voices that suggest absolute or definitive answers, Brown and Gilligan argue for a feminist philosophy that offers “voices we believe are worth listening to” (7). Further, the two critics postulate that these voices explore interpersonal relationships in distinct ways because “[w]omen in contrast [to men], tended to speak of themselves as living in connection with others and yet

described a relational crisis: a giving of voice, an abandonment of self, for the sake of becoming a good woman and having relationships” (2).

This study also becomes a key component in the analysis of post apartheid voices. Given the complex socio-historical dynamics of South Africa, this investigation becomes a step to characterizing the voice against which other apartheid voices will be compared. Many a post apartheid activist believes that race and class oppression is effectively achieved in South Africa today through silence on pertinent issues. Speaking of the more widely read and accessible white literature, Mandisi Majavu expresses that:

Even though some elements of apartheid were defeated, literary culture is still an arena for the dehumanisation and colonisation of blacks. And so if one looks at South African literature, one finds that there has been very little change in the representation of black people in fictional work that sells, and which the public at large has access to. (23)

Essentially, the message is that when black women position themselves to inform storytelling in South Africa, their voice functions with other voices to seek to effect change by addressing women’s concerns and speaking to all about what it means to be human.

Finally, Farida Karodia is from a hybrid family. Her father is an Asian and her mother a Coloured giving the writer both a Muslim/Christian religious

background. In fact, critics such as Killam and Rowe describe Karodia as a versatile writer whose writings draw from her personal varied background to depict protagonists of various ethnic groups – coloureds, blacks and Asians and often in interaction with each other (6). This mixed racial identity that played out in her own life is a strong theme in her writings as played out in the racially divided South Africa. Asian issues, in particular, were often treated with less importance in the face of the dominant white enemy.

To this end, I argue that in a study that shines the spotlight on previously muted voices, Karodia's multiply marginalized voice holds perspectives worthy of womanist concerns. Perhaps the continued need to overcome layers of oppression suggests Campbell, gives the marginalised the impetus to continue undeterred to express their voice:

As a critic I have become convinced that the rhetoric of those on the margins is more interesting precisely because the obstacles such groups confront force them to be more ingenious, to rise to imaginative heights required of the powerful only in moments of crisis. (5-6)

For women who have been marginalized, therefore, the specificity of their presence needs to be established with the aim of allowing women to voice their reality and their form of solutions. Although African women did experience marginalization, Asian women were all the more marginalized because the racial

polarity of apartheid prevented the encompassing of their position; “a middle place in a dichotomous racial model that had no room for shades of grey, both in its oppressive and oppositional modes” (Rastogi 11).

Indeed any scholarship of Indians had to be accommodated in the grand narrative of the freedom struggle that forged one identity for all non-white people. Even in the post apartheid era, Rastogi documents how “numerous books, anthologies and journals commemorating the “new” South Africa either erase the Indian presence or incline toward nominal recognition” (13). South African Indian writers include about twelve names of which, Rastogi states, “scholarship still has enormous holes to fill in its knowledge of this oeuvre ... and [d]spate the proliferation of texts studying South African literature in more inclusive ways, the works of South African Indian writers remain neglected” (12).

## **1.9 Literature Review**

The literature in this section is organized into two aspects: one, a general summary of what has been written about African literature from a feminist/womanist perspective and two; what has been written in this specific area of developing new discourse that is female-centred as a means for the black woman to critically give expression to her circumstances. In this section, feminism and womanism will be used interchangeably.

### 1.9.1 Womanist Perspective of African Literature

In *Feminist Issues in the Fiction of Kenya's Women Writers*, Jean O'Barr lists three main categories of feminist concerns in the fiction of Kenyan woman writers: "how female children become women; ... what marriage means for woman; ... where women's work fits into their lives" (57). In her analysis of several authors, O'Barr observes how they "all write from the woman's point of view, sharply underscoring the idea that the female perspective ... may be different from the male perspective on the same topic" (58). Using a sociological approach, O'Barr is able to determine a clearer image of the social lives of Kenya's women than is possible from the works of male authors. Her conclusions speak of the constraints that Kenya women find themselves in: "they see themselves performing traditional roles ... without traditional resources ... while at the same time they are undertaking modern activities ... while denied access to modern support systems" (69).

O'Barr's study shares a point of departure from this study in that it looks at the fiction of women in order to locate the reality of their lives, however, the sociological approach is descriptive at best, and tethered to a male perspective. In order to arrive at a "different" female view of social events, this study aims to assess women's lives using tools that display woman's unique response to their social environment. Because gender is a confounding variable in public communication (Campbell 6) women when contrasted to men can only be



misunderstood and obstructed from becoming a unified self. This study seeks to emphasize discourse as a means of positioning women, and furthermore transforming those positions from margin to centre.

African women writers have also been studied under the category of “radical, feminist-separatist ideology” (Owusu 19) for their controversial interpretations of women’s relationships with men. In her article entitled “Women without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa” Katherine Frank points out that African women to a radically feminist future. She places African women writers into the Western feminist mould by speaking of their work as an even more radical progression of the Western feminist tradition. Frank finds that the “feminist” writers of Africa portray women not only as participating fully in roles with men, but as finding “a destiny of their own ... a destiny with a vengeance” (15). She argues that writers such as Mariama Ba, Flora Nwapa, and Ama Ata Aidoo’s novels are, “more radical, even more militant, than [their] Western counterpart[s](15)” because in these novels women find only pain and degradation in their relationships with men, but on their own and in their relationships with other women they find “female solidarity, power, independence” (33). The controversy that Frank raises is whether the authors speak to the desire of women living without men or the recognition that a woman can be independent of a man and her worth is not reliant on her relationship with men.

Frank's critique of black women's writings touches on this study in that it speaks to women to shape their own identities while resisting and exposing patriarchal oppression. However, our theory resists the western approach of 'woman alone' primarily because the very purpose of the black women's liberation is that her distinct perspective of life emerges from the shadows to offer wholeness and healing to unite family and community.

Elleke Boehmer explores Achebe's construction of women as mothers, whores, representations of national pride and as spiritual advisors and supporters. She notes that the roles they play are passive and insignificant and of no crucial political value. Boehmer analyzes Achebe's endeavour to position women in his re-vision of the future and distinguishes them as vehicles of transformation but not players: "woman is the ground of change or discursive displacement but not the subject of transformation" (102). Boehmer grants that Achebe takes women a step forward by opening up spaces for them in yet undefined roles for the future, where they could get involved alongside men. However, he does still idealize women in that he portrays them as positive symbols but unfortunately lacking in depth of character.

### **1.9.2 Invention Discourse**

This study of Karodia's invention of women aims to assess how she articulates a womanist voice in her texts. While Achebe's works speak with the centrality and authority of maleness, a womanist reading will pose questions about the roles of women as seekers and holders of an alternate knowledge. This

knowledge clarifies a standpoint of and for black women and consists of what Patricia Collins considers being “the experiences and ideas shared by [black] women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society” (22). The role that black women play in the building of the future must be defined by them and informed by womanist thought and its legacies of awareness, struggle and self-definition of women of Africa. This study will assess the extent to which Karodia’s characters are seen to express this worldview.

This section will now consider other works done on the invention of woman, where invention is defined variously as women shaping their own identities, countering prescriptions of authorities, raising consciousness and resisting/exposing oppression. In “Inventing Women: From Amaterasu to Virginia Woolf”, Campbell analyzes various works written and spoken in the past by women and provides instances to show how inventing women is a key element in the erosion of the myths that justify women’s subordination. Campbell identifies subversion as the tool used repeatedly by women to achieve a number of effects: raise consciousness by revealing the changing social construction of gender, appropriate the forms of dominant discourse for their own ends, create dilemmas for audiences, assume roles that gave them access to the argumentation reserved for males and used the language of family and domesticity to reframe relationships.

Campbell’s analysis is a useful point of departure for this study in that it selects historical pieces written by women ranging from the Orient to the West to

show how their writings “echo but transcend convention”. This study which aims to assess Karodia’s use of the principles and essentials of invention is different in that it aims to expose the context and distinction of a black woman’s range of writings to show how they function as a body. Often for women of longstanding literary and historical traditions, their writings reflect their advocacy for women’s rights. The context of the South African black woman is incomplete without the dimensions of race and class.

In *Rhetoric and Resistance in Black Women’s Autobiography*, Johannie Stover analyzes four black women’s autobiographies to attempt to explain why the African American mother tongue should be read as an alternate discourse. She emphasizes how this discourse has historical importance in addition to its current use. Stover suggests that the autobiographies represent the rhetoric used to resist, manipulate and expose social, political and racialized oppression. She argues that their writing style and resistance language demonstrates a unique black female voice or “mother tongue” and analyzes these works in the context of protest. To Stover the tongue represents the ability to speak and write, which empowered black women under an oppressive system that demanded they remain voiceless and uneducated.

Stover’s study is relevant in that it forms a foundational assessment of African American women writers who wrote against enormous odds. Their struggle resonates with that of South African women who endured their triple form of oppression. Stover’s study identifies slavery and the circumstances of the

subject's lives as the element against which the writers revolve their resistance. Hence, this study recognizes that a woman's voice is clearest when she is able to expose the oppression that is uniquely experienced by her. If the aims of inventing women include the raising of female consciousness leading to self-definition, then this study will establish the specific forms of oppression that Karodia distinguishes in the life of the post apartheid black woman. Women's ability to confront their oppression and resist victimization is simultaneously the ground from where they can gain a voice.

Finally, in *A Gesture of Defiance: selected texts by Black South African women writers*, Mante Mphahlele looks at autobiographical writings by Black South African women through the lens of how they make a contribution of an alternative line of providing female heroes and women writers that presents an alternative history of the country. By writing themselves into a history which excluded them and speaking of their painful experiences under apartheid, Mphahlele posits that "these women engage in a gesture of defiance" (6). Not only had the system curtailed their freedom in sharing of their trials, but even worse, the nature of the struggle left them invisible and inconsequential. Such writings aspired to set the record straight. Though they may not have known it, their act of voicing their selflessness, pride and commitment to the community was an invention of woman. Using the discourse available to them, these women moved from silence to speech and left a legacy from which future generations of women writers could draw.

This study will draw from that same tradition to view Karodia's writings as a gesture of defiance where she writes in the face of new silencing foes. As in the past, women writers cannot wait to be handed an opportunity to write nor wait for external recognition of their works. This study will build on this foundation to focus on how Farida Karodia as a post apartheid woman writer gives voice to the struggles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century black woman.

### **1.10 Theoretical Framework**

This study employs the resources and views of a womanist theory as its theoretical basis. It also adjoins Susan Walby's peculiar type of feminism which situates the concept of patriarchy as central to a feminist understanding of society. A perspective from Interactionism will guide this study as it considers the construction of meaning while a theory of rhetorical invention will identify the discourse of change that illustrates new thoughts about women.

Like other theoretical perspectives, womanist thinking continues to evolve. As Bell Hooks asserts, "theorizing is fundamental to self-recovery and collective liberation" (4). Womanist scholars have sought foremost to broaden the meaning of feminism.

A major problem with the term "feminism" is that Black women generally associate feminist analyses and politics with white women, who, along with white men, are benefactors of systemic racism (McIntosh 26). Consequently, "womanist," "Black feminist," "African feminist," and "Third World feminist"

have been used in a variety of contexts to signify the theories, perspectives and actions of Black writers who are particularly concerned with Black women's historical, cultural, social, economic, and political realities. Black women scholars confront the ongoing challenge to develop a language that describes an autonomous, practical, community-focused way of knowing. Alice Walker's definition calls attention to the multiple oppression of Black women, but also is committed to the survival of all people. She further observes that "a womanist understands that the well-being of her own people is related to the larger struggle of the human community" (xi-xii).

Womanist theory examines the interlocking, hierarchies of gender, race and class and the challenges of identifying and articulating the woman's voice in society, "We must act with deliberation and commitment in order to ensure that all women have a voice and an audience for the telling of the lives" (Etter-Lewis 9). According to Patricia Collins, the foundation of womanist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by women of the African diaspora which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. This standpoint as Collins puts it consists of "the experiences and ideas shared by [Black] women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community and society" (22). The primary goal of womanism, then, as Hudson-Weems postulates, is to create criteria for assessing the realities of African women in thought and action. These criteria challenged Western feminist assumptions and earlier theoretical approaches.

For example, African womanists have made their contribution to black women's historical studies by describing the communal structure of traditional African societies which assumed egalitarian interactions among African women and men. Hence, discussions of the experiences of the majority of African women must focus on multiple forms of oppression, not simply sexual imbalance. To this end, this study concurs with Steady (96) that colonialism, imperialism, and their legacies continue to be the primary oppressors of African women.

A significant aspect of womanist theory is the awareness and analysis of stereotypes and images of Black womanhood that perpetuates and justifies the oppressions of what Steady categorizes as, "slavery, imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, poverty, racism and apartheid" (97). Another aspect of womanist theory is the need to clarify the multiple roles that Black women play in the struggle for the survival of the black community and in the struggle for institutional change. Ultimately, as James and Busia point out, womanist theorizing is transformative for black women and their communities, while it empowers black women to challenge their own communities to be rid of oppressive beliefs and practices.

However, while womanist theory is concerned with ridding communities of oppressive beliefs and practices, it deems all oppression as equal. Sylvia Walby says that "patriarchy is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality" (7). Her definition of patriarchy, notably, is different from that of other feminist. She argues that there are six patriarchal structures which restrict women and help



maintain male domination. These are: paid work, patriarchal relations within the household, patriarchal culture, sexuality, male violence towards women and lastly, the state. The existence of the structures, she argues, restricts the choices that women in particular can make.

While this feminist approach incorporates many different feminists, Walby's treatment of gender, race and class as separate systems which interact with each one can be problematic. The reality is that capitalism and racism are all part of one system which advantages some groups and disadvantages others. In this study, however, which looks at the post apartheid positioning of black women, the re-balancing of women's relationships is important to exposing women's violence and exploitation of women in their relationships with their men folk as well as women's continued disadvantageous position in the work place. The changes that have taken place in public and private forms of patriarchy will be assessed through the voice of the writer.

While feminist theory explains how society works as a system, we will use Interaction theory to focus on woman's interaction on a smaller scale. Interactionists begin with the assumption that action is meaningful to those involved. To understand the action of individuals requires an interpretation of the meanings (it is open to a number of them) that actors give to their activities. Because meanings are not fixed, they are subject to be created, developed, modified and changed within the process of interaction.

The way in which actors define situations has important consequences. It is a clear representation of their reality as evident by their actions and this is crucial for black women whose reality is often determined by others. There are three levels at which actors define their worlds; at the levels of self-concepts, construction of meaning and negotiation and roles.

*Self-concept:* The individual is inspired to a change in response depending, in part, on their interpretation of the way others see them. Therefore, the idea of the self is important to Interactionists because it is in interaction processes that a self-concept develops – as a direct result of the reaction of others towards the individual: hence the term looking glass self coined by Charles Cooley (qtd in Coser 19).

*Construction of Meaning:* Interactionists are concerned with how change occurs through the process by which definitions of situations and self are constructed. Most specifically they ask, how does an individual come to be defined in a certain way? An investigation of the construction of meaning in interaction processes leads to an analysis of the way actors interpret the language, gestures, appearance and manner of others as well as the context of the interaction. Depending on desired outcome, a process of negotiation during interaction allows for the construction of definitions and meanings.

*Negotiation and roles:* the idea of negotiation is also applied to the concept of role. Interactionists argue that roles are often unclear, ambiguous and vague. It is this lack of clarity that provides actors space for negotiation,

improvisation and creative action. Social roles, therefore, are continually negotiated making them fluid and changeable in interaction process.

This brings us to the intersection of: women's need for change, feminist discourse and an interactionist perspective, from where we can analyze Karodia's texts. As Karodia invents woman, she recognizes the need to use writing to create a visible woman who is not the exception. To do this, Karodia is compelled to use resources other than those available in the master's house, to depict how black women in their interactions bring about change that impact their world positively.

In her writing on inventing women, Campbell postulates that the principle of rhetorical invention is subversion – using existing conditions to undermine and sabotage in order to bring about change. This study aims to scrutinise Karodia's writings for the elements of subverting existing socio-cultural principles.

This study will also borrow from Gates' African-American concept of signifyin(g), which states that invention exploits the past in its parasitic ways; “it adapts, reframes, juxtaposes, associates, satirizes, reverses, ridicules, and appropriates dominant discourse, using and misusing every means by which meanings are corrupted and contested” ( qtd in Campbell 98). The idea of subversion is best conceived through the eyes of the most marginalized, making a black female Asian writer a most credible voice to attend. To this end, Campbell recommends:

As a critic I have become convinced that the rhetoric of those on the margins is more interesting precisely because the obstacles

such groups confront force them to be more ingenious, to rise to imaginative heights required of the powerful only in moments of crises. (5-6)

The post apartheid era, as noted earlier, presents new forms of resistance to women's struggles for subjectivity and voice. This study will delve into Karodia's works to identify her discourse of invention and the artistic skill that illustrates new thoughts about women as evident in their self-definition and the new spaces from which they invent to speak.

### **1.11 Methodology**

Being a textual study, our main focus will be on selected post-apartheid texts by Farida Karodia that best represent her commitment to the issues affecting the contemporary black woman. The diversity of her writings include images of African, Indian and coloured women who are variously poor and struggling, comfortable and pampered and/or married, single, divorced, educated, uneducated, Christian, Muslim or Hindu. Women being heterogeneous are represented in all their diversity and this study attempts to capture the writer's voicing of this plurality.

The following post-apartheid texts that are part of her larger body of works were selected for this study: *A Chance Encounter*, *Other Secrets*, *The Red Velvet Dress*, *Seeds of Discontent*, *Friends*, *Against an African Sky* and *other stories*, and *A Shattering of Silence*. To this end, the chosen texts were critically

analyzed for their discernment of the location of the black woman historically, socially and economically in the patriarchal structures. This analysis was augmented by extensive library research on critical material available on female oppression that silences and the writer's distinct expression of their conditions in her works. The works of African-American female literary critics on women's oppression in America were particularly relevant because of the many similarities between their civil rights struggle and that of the post apartheid woman. Other sources were used to enrich this study at all times especially in the area of social change and reinvention so as to achieve an exhaustive and detailed study.

### **1.12 Scope and Delimitations**

This study deals specifically with the body of Karodia's texts written in the post-apartheid era. Reference, however, is made to her earlier texts in regard to supporting analyses. By focusing on the one writer, this study is able to submit her works to a rigorous investigation for their intersection of a womanist perspective and invention discourse, all with an eye on the contexts of history and complex social dynamics.

Finally, the theoretical framework chosen is specific to this study to enable a study of the black woman at a societal as well as at an individual level while considering language as it represents woman but also allows for a negotiation of self. This enquiry on the writer's voice will be a study of both style

and the writer's vision grounded in Karodia's personal history and the complexities of the society for which she writes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GIVING CONTEXT TO VOICE

*Masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.*

**Virginia Woolf**

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to discuss the socio-cultural and historical factors that shaped the lives of black women and the voice of early black women writers as stated in the first objective of the study. As noted previously, when the black woman's voice occasioned to express itself, it aimed to give presence to the woman and transform her muted and silenced nature.

Women who cannot speak out are seen as disempowered, unable to act and to effect change. The search for empowerment has thus become a search for "women's voices and particularly so when women speak out against patriarchal authority" (Kabeer 19). Silence can be associated with powerlessness. Women are thus positioned as a 'muted' group. The silence of women is the absence of women's voices and their concerns from literature. This silencing occurred in patriarchal societies where the interests of women are rarely taken into account rendering the circumstances of black women's lives as non-existent from mainstream literature.

In the South African literary context, the battle to achieve a voice is the singular challenge for black women<sup>1</sup>. They also need to provide evidence that on a thematic and ideological level, they have a distinct contribution to make to the literary tradition. Dale Spender historically saw that the writing act for women was in itself an act of defiance where a woman seeks to regain autonomy, “To write was to be; it was to create and to exist. It was to construct a world view without interference from the “masters” (22). By the act of examining the works of a black woman writer, the everyday lives of women are now brought to prominence. Karodia, like many South African women writers, depicts protagonists who are women (as well as men), and the story of women trapped in social constraints is a subject of regular concern to the female writer.

## **2.2 Invention and the Developing of Thought**

In this section we seek to explore the ways in which the writings of black women are distinguishable historically and culturally from mainstream white and black male works. Given the realities of the racially stratified society, it is not unforeseen that the literatures, too, would develop independent of one another. The social roles that black, coloured and Asian women played left them most disadvantaged in expressing and developing a literary identity, yet through autobiographies and early writings, they defied the silencing. To defy a position

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<sup>1</sup> South Africans today, for identification purposes, prefer to keep their former apartheid group classifications (black, coloured, Asian) even where they have the option of discarding the differentiations. Hence, non-white writers all consider themselves as black writers.



or truth relates to the concept of invention – a Latin term meaning “to come upon” or “find”. Invention also communicates the question about how thought develops. For black women, the direction for change in their circumstances might not always have been clear, but accepting the universal ‘truth’ about their condition was manifestly rejected by them. Their role in the social fabric required that history, at best, acknowledge their presence.

Whether or not their writings were intended to directly bring about change is debatable as suggested by modern theorists such as Nietzsche and later Foucault, who have explored the social construction of reality and concluded that the processes by which one construction replaces another is yet unclear. Campbell adds her view to the conversation with the submission that the primary tenet of invention is the employ of subversion – specifically the master’s tools of language and symbols. She recognizes how language is both a constraint, in that it is the creation of man, and a resource, which can be manipulated to serve the interests of women. Invention, Campbell offers:

Exploits the past ... it is parasitic; it adapts, reframes, juxtaposes, associates, satirizes, reverses, ridicules, and appropriates dominant discourse, using and misusing every means by which meanings are corrupted and contested. (3)

To illustrate how women writers of the past executed the complex struggle of claiming subjectivity and voice where the rules are dictated by the oppressor(s),

Campbell depicts how women had to invent for themselves roles and spaces from which their voices could be heard because constructions of womanhood silenced them and denied them true citizenship.

### **2.3 Inventing in Defiance**

In the context of South Africa, black women writers were called to the task of inventing women as dictated by the harsh conditions of apartheid whereby survival for self and community often took priority over the inclination to write. Farida Karodia is amongst several black women writers who are part of a South African literary tradition where works by black women are notably absent.

As a South African writer, Farida Karodia grew up in a world of racist and capitalist exploitation. Under these circumstances, considerably more writing was produced by white writers than by black ones. In addition, even as these black writers increased their output of protest literature under the crushing oppression of apartheid, women writers were few. The contribution of black women was erratic and irregular and even writers in exile (Farida Karodia herself falling into this category) experienced a disconnection from writers at home. In these conditions the formations of a writing tradition proved challenging and elusive.

There were several reasons why very few black South African women were able to express themselves in writing. Apart from factors of their class and race position, their socialization was strongly patriarchal leading them to more traditional roles of being wives and mothers. As Ann Poshai observes:

Patriarchy in Africa is engaged in a distinct form of representing society and social relations ... it expresses partial truths in the service of men as dominant members of the societies. Patriarchy influences the material conditions of most African societies and underscores differences in gender relations. (7)

Black women were, to this end, sometimes encouraged to read but never to write. In any case, they were far too preoccupied with the nation and women's struggle to have time to document their experiences. The face of the woman was rendered invisible in a struggle that was male-dominated.

However, the need to be seen and heard was both real and urgent. As one woman recounts of her experiences in Fester:

A concern for many of us organisational women at that time was that there were frequent visitors, from Europe and North America... They would interview us women activists, and then return home to write books on us and become the 'experts' on South African women's struggles. It was disturbing to read how they sometimes distorted what we had shared with them. We felt the need to write our stories from our perspective but of course, there was never any time. Later, South African white women also started interviewing us and writing about our stories. ....it was important that our stories be told but, on the other hand, it seemed

to us to be fitting into the apartheid mould: white women were writing about black women's struggles. (3)

The corpus of black South African women's writings output of the sixties to the nineties is, therefore, a recollection of diverse aspects of a displaced people trying, amidst legislated restrictions, to tell the story of their survival and existence. Mphahlele observes that:

They brought to light lives interlaced with hardship, misery, and pain, all of which jockeyed for position with an insatiable hunger and zest for life. Whatever their lot was, they also celebrated life ... They also introduced new discourses that enabled them to negotiate communion with political power and influence (10).

*(underline mine for emphasis)*

According to Mphahalele, as black women wrote, they demonstrated acts of courage and resilience in their quest for healing necessitated by an existence that objectified them. Mphahalele employs the concept of a 'gesture of defiance' from Hooks who illustrates how that attitude:

Is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of talking back that is no mere gesture of empty words that is the

expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice (9).

While autobiographical writings served to make visible the contributions of a matrilineal line of heroes and women writers who shaped an alternative history, the role of novels and short stories by black women tells the story of the unremarkable and unexceptional woman whose lives and aspirations were limited by walls they were not always able to successfully confront.

Farida Karodia, who did some writing during the apartheid years, significantly expanded her title list since the ending of apartheid. Earlier, she had written one novel and a set of short stories - *Daughters of the Twilight, Coming Home*. This first novel is later reworked and becomes the first book of her novel *Other Secrets*, where she builds on that initial story and updates it to make it relevant to a new post apartheid female readership. She is rendered “little known” as a writer due to the marginalization of Asian women’s concerns in light of the larger national struggle to which all else took second place. This point will be expounded upon further on.

#### **2.4 Giving Context to Content – An Historical Approach**

The importance of a feminist perspective of history is that it helps define women’s position in society and gives context to the workings of day-to-day experiences, personal relationships, social settings and various modes of

expression. The content of the stories, autobiographies and poems comes to life in celebration of women who dared to defy and speak out against the oppressive legislation – the Suppression of Communism Act and the Publications and Entertainment Act of 1963 – whereby it was a criminal offence to write, publish or circulate any material or ideals thought to be critical of the apartheid policy or government. The effect of the legislation was to silence whole sections of the population and made the narratives of masses of women irretrievably lost to history.

The women that Karodia writes of - the African Flora in *Getting Through the Night*, the coloured Katrina in *The Red Velvet Dress*, and the Hindu Sushila in *Crossmatch*, to mention but a few of her protagonists, can all trace their roots to some form of subjugation which continues to inform the present reality. Barrett argues that women's oppression is best analysed using an historical approach, "The questions that concern me are the how and why of women's oppression today, but I am sure that the answers to these questions cannot be deduced in strictly theoretical terms. Accordingly, I argue for an historical approach..."(5). Where formulations about women and their place in society have been over simplified, a historical approach becomes useful in giving new perspective to the past – and, for the purposes of this study, the present.

### **2.4.1. Gender Hierarchy of Black Women**

Unpredictable and explosive developments typified the social, political and economic life of South Africa from the early nineteenth century up to the middle of the twentieth century when apartheid was established.

#### **2.4.1.1 African Women**

Firstly, the African existence went from an essentially rural lifestyle, under indigenous forms of production, enjoying political independence as it co-existed with the whites and evolved into an African society under capitalist means of production, subjugated, under urban racial structures essentially designed to promote white supremacy.

These socio-cultural changes had far-reaching effects on the position of the women. Whether it was traditional society or colonial rule, women were always subordinate to men in what Bozzoli suggests amounts to a “patchwork quilt of patriarchies” (21) – referring to the levels of subjugation in the female experience. What characterised the changes were the different social systems that dominated the region at the time – the indigenous Bantu-speaking societies and its interaction with the colonial settler sex-gender system.

According to Cherryl Walker it was the collision of these two systems and the domination of the settler over the indigenous that set in place the struggle by the indigenous men and women of the region:

To defend their own interests and wrest what they could from the new opportunities and constraints ... even as relations between the sexes in colonial society were being restructured by the ... increasingly industrialised and urbanised society. In the political and economic transformation of the region ... gender constituted a critical battleground: here not only men and women confronted each other, but also the colonisers and the colonised (2).

This social, political and economic transformation sets the frame for the triple oppression of gender, race and class that gives context to women's oppression in contemporary South Africa. An understanding of the dynamics of men and women's historical experience in society and cross-culturally is necessary to this analysis of Farida Karodia's voice in her texts. More specifically, when we consider the background informing the black female experience, Cherryl Walker's view is useful:

The meaning of 'woman' was not the same in pre-colonial as it was in twentieth century southern Africa; it was not the same in pre-colonial as it was in settler society. The differences went beyond obvious ones in the type of work and responsibilities assigned to women, to encompass the structural significance of the sexual division of labour within these societies, as well as the social meaning assigned to women's roles (26).



According to Jeff Guy, more specifically, the history of African women in southern Africa is the history of their oppression. Whether in pre-colonial or colonial periods, the domestic sphere has been identified as the location of women's oppression as Harris observes that: "gender subordination is produced and reproduced" (50). The woman's role in indigenous society was centred on the domestic space around the homestead and its' roles of reproduction and production, and not the public space linked to political power.

#### **2.4.1.2 Indian Women**

Asian women, too, entered the continent in a subordinate position. At the turn of the twentieth century, Indian women found themselves at the very bottom of the class-race-gender hierarchy in South Africa. They came from India as part of the indentured male immigrants who came to work as labourers in the sugar industry. Having come as indentured workers, the women were the most exploited, given the hardest and least skilled tasks of the labour force. Finding themselves outside the bonds of marriage and the patriarchal family, Indian women found themselves passed around from man to man in the barracks they lived in. Thus they had to endure the label of being promiscuous as well as being subordinate to the men in the immigrant population and the broader relations of gender that developed under the colonial rule.

Indeed conditions of oppression were intense. This led them to devise strategies of survival outside the bonds of marriage. Even with the end of the indenture system, the Indian family was able to reassert itself and became a shelter and retreat from the larger oppressive world. However, as far as the woman's personal liberty was concerned, as Beall in Walker points out: "the Indian family has also enabled oppressive gender relations to persist and has been the site of gender struggles between men and women in the twentieth century" (167).

#### **2.4.1.3 Coloured Women**

To be Coloured in the South African context meant (and continues to mean) that an individual draws parentage from more than one 'naturalised' racial group. The history of racial segregation and group labelling placed all such mixed people in a certain relationship together by virtue of the fact that the apartheid governments categorized them as so. The idea of Coloured people developed partly to describe the complex position of those who belonged to neither the White or to any other group alone.

#### **2.5 The nature of defiance**

The literary history of South Africa - which can be traced to its beginnings in the 1820s to an English and Afrikaans settler traditions - reveals that black women are not only relatively new comers to the writing tradition but are also just

a handful in number when viewed against their counterparts – white male writers, black male writers and white female writers.

### **2.5.1. A Black literary History**

The divisions of apartheid life were reflected and continue to be evident in the literary representation. It was not until 1946 that the first novel written by a non-white, Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy*, reached an international audience. From this grew a vigorous Black male writing that expressed their perception of events while challenging the regime under which they were forced to live. These included Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, Bloke Modiane's *Blame Me on History*, and Alfred Hutchison's *Road to Ghana*.

Drum Magazine which was started in the 1950s was initially aimed at the new Black urban population to provide an avenue for new writers to show their social commitment in a lively and popular manner. This was the beginning of a new South African writing that depicted life seen from the African male point of view. It was from their autobiographical/quasi-fictional style that the short story genre became popular in Black South African writing and remains so even in the post-apartheid era.

The content was the depiction of life in the midst and in spite of the violence and numerous forms of official persecution. Whether drawing from direct experience or from the larger urban black experience, these writers used their craft as investigative journalists, commentators, editors, critics, poets and

novelists to represent and develop views of politically aware South Africans. But it wasn't only the Drum generation that gave voice to the black liberation movement. One of South Africa's most important white writers, Nadine Gordimer started writing her short stories in the early 1950s where she articulated key issues for white South Africans sympathetic to the plight of disenfranchised blacks. Perhaps her greatest contribution was in providing for the outside world a glimpse of the devastating picture of life under apartheid.

Noni Jabavu and Bessie Head wrote in the 1950s and 1960s after they had left the country. Within South Africa, the only black South African woman to publish fiction in English in the 1970s was Miriam Tlali who again published a novel in 1980 and short stories 1989. In that decade there were only five works of fiction written by black women and those came from outside the country. These writers were Lauretta Ngcobo, Farida Karodia - who produced two, Zoe Wicomb and Agnes Sam. It becomes difficult thereafter to trace a consistent thread through their writings.

In the 1970s with the killing of leading figures like Steve Biko, the forced exile of activists and writers, and the schoolchildren's revolt, South Africa experienced a literary revival of black voices that had been silenced by repression. This period became the defining moment for the development of political consciousness and with it emerged the Black Consciousness (BC) movement. BC advanced the affirmation of black cultural values and a racial solidarity in the face of state oppression. Literature became the vehicle that black male writers and

poets employed to promote their anti-apartheid ideals, often in graphic language aimed at arousing the emotions of listeners. The Asian race is often accorded minimal recognition of their literary presence in the region.

### **2.5.2. Black Women's literary Tradition**

Where women in history have been stereotyped, degraded, objectified and portrayed as powerless (Campbell 7), and more specifically under apartheid law made to bear “the cross of abuse, poverty, oppression, humiliation, detention, exile and finally, death” (Mphahalele 12), the voice in their works exhibited creativity, innovation and highlighted concerns that were exclusive to their woman's hearts. Campbell selects global examples – the African-American slave tradition, early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese feminist works and Queen Elizabeth I – to mention but a few, to illustrate how women historically had to break ranks with convention in order to be heard. As they wrote and spoke, women employed parody, called history to their defence, wittily transcended lack of precedence, manipulated existing contradictions and exploited prayer, hymns and poetry to make their social appeals (Campbell 8).

In the South African women's autobiographical tradition, their defiance was against the authorities whose objective it was to obliterate black history through poverty, forced settlements and migratory labour systems. The themes, subsequently, demonstrated their non-compliance as women wrote letters and

journals to their Magona in *Children's Children* and Ngcobo in *My husband and Our Children*, daring to keep the intergenerational link alive.

Black women also wrote about their personal experiences in exile to stamp their existence into history (Makeba 19) and shape their own identity. Equally, there were examples of women whose encounters of the harsh realities of apartheid South Africa made them 'dream of a heroic deaths' because they "have vowed to resist this abominable system by whatever means necessary", and they have finally as Mphahalele observes, "come to the understanding that exile – that condition of capricious physical freedom forever assaulted by mental and emotional torture – could never offer her any spiritual security or safety" (13).

## **2.6 Alternate Perspectives**

Historical accounts and studies that inform this investigation and many others provide researchers with a general overview of women's lives. In the absence of women's personal testimonies detailing the peculiarities of their experiences, historical documentation becomes the basis from which narratives are either retold or told in a version that challenges the facts. Mphahlele to this effect suggests that "whoever reaches the microphone first has the power to manipulate the slant or direction that his/her idea ... will take, and that all what follows will go according to that slant" (13).

The evidence so far points to a black woman's voice rooted in defiance of apartheid, and that tone inevitably had a measure of influence on later post

apartheid writings. In the subsequent section, we will argue that defiance (which should have been rendered obsolete in the new era) was not completely absent post-apartheid for two reasons: Firstly, there arose a need for blacks to re-write a ‘slanted’ history and secondly, Asian writing, which informed part of Karodia’s heritage, witnessed a renaissance that compelled them to “show their true colours” (Radhakrishnan 5). Karodia gives her voice to this history by giving faces, names and emotion to a situation that would have chosen to oppress them into silence.

## **2.6 Contemporary Literature and the Historical Past**

One of the features of the new South Africa is a fresh interest in history and historical fiction. This section, to this end, will illustrate how Karodia writes with defiance to give an account of women’s lives that were historically distorted and ignored. Apartheid literature as a tool of the struggle represented the current moment and obviated writers from examining the past. In Nkosi’s words, “in [apartheid] South Africa the pressure of the future is so enormous that looking backwards seems a luxury” (79). Post-apartheid literature, therefore, involves a new writing of history by retrieving the past in new terms; there was a new interest in autobiographical writing, the rewriting of history and what Pereira considers to be, “a revival of interest in the travel journals, letters and memoirs of explorers, hunters and missionaries” (1).

The formation of the new society would rely on a depiction of a historical reality to form a future. Deganaar proposes that as the national consciousness

evolves, South African writers need to write stories which resonate historically in order to illuminate the future:

Events in the past have to be interpreted in an imaginative way.

Storytelling is the most appropriate way of doing this. Stories about the past enable us to create and share a common future. They contribute to the production and consumption of an informed culture, for it is through the art of storytelling that a culture is enriched with intertextual significance. (11)

To Degenaar, this is the “unfinished business of our collective history” that needs to be addressed as the nation defines itself. The sometimes unbearable stories told at the 1996 Truth and Reconciliation of the human rights abuses set the pace for remembering the past. As Ndebele cites about the need to not suppress the evils of the past:

We have to cry out when the past is being deliberately forgotten in order to ensure that what was gained by it can now be enjoyed without compunction. It is crucial at this point that the past be seen as a legitimate point about the challenges of the present and the future. The past, no matter how horrible it has been, can redeem us. It can be the moral foundation on which to build the pillars of the future. (155)



Karodia, too, projects a backward glance into apartheid. Through it, she expresses the way in which discrimination and oppression damage the very relations between people that make them human. She highlights this repeatedly in numerous texts by magnifying the tensions created by the existential situations of oppressor/oppressed, and the duality of us/them resulting from the colonial experience (“The Red Velvet Dress” in *Opening Spaces*).

Her observations, for example, on the effects of Christianity tell a different story from that recorded in history texts. According to historians (Guy 7; C.Walker 14), Christianity, is chiefly recognized for the role it played in reorganising gender relations in South Africa. They assert that it taught women the attributes of a the ‘good’ Christian woman – obedience to the authority of husband and father, the ‘proper’ management of their households as wives and mothers, as well as a socialising that prepared them for service to others – in white households. But as Christianity reorganised the social structure, it sometimes served to give women a form of personal autonomy based on Western individualism. Where oppressive relationships in African society – unwanted marriage, infertility, etc, - as Cheryl Walker observes, were disadvantageous to some, Christianity provided not only economic independence and education but spiritual enrichment as well:

The women’s prayer unions ... met compelling social and psychological needs...women found an outlet for organisational

talents that were otherwise frustrated by racial, patriarchal and class mechanisms of suppression and control. Immersion in Christian ritual and doctrine provided adherents with spiritual comfort and sustenance ... against the onslaughts of rapid and disturbing social change (16).

Karodia's version of the impact of religion is divulged in *A Shattering of Silence* as she narrates the story of Faith, a child of missionary parents who becomes a victim of war and ends up living in a Catholic mission orphanage. She escapes a massacre that claimed the lives of her parents through the help of Lodiya, the sixteen-year old daughter of their nanny; however, she is left mute by the traumatic experience. It is the treatment of these child victims of war at the orphanage that makes Karodia critical of the practices of the faith. The initiation of converts, in her estimation, is a bartering of aid to the needy for exchange for conversion to Catholicism. Through Lodiya, the author intimates "at the possibility that Father Fernando and [Faith's] parents had competed for Catholic and Protestant converts" (Karodia, 23). The young Faith perceives such a notion as "offensive" (ibid).

Secondly, Karodia paints a picture of the practice of Christianity as the subjugation of the natives to an unfamiliar religion instead of adapting the religion to "the rhythm of the indigenous culture" (24). While at the mission school, the children encounter extreme intolerance to the traditions and the culture that they

had known all their lives. They soon learnt that those “who wore ritual amulets or charms were punished severely” (25). They had to abandon their own languages for Portuguese as well as their beliefs perceived to be heathen.

Finally, Karodia questions the love exemplified by the Catholic nuns at the orphanage. The intolerance of the nuns to the indigenous way of life shows them to be bigoted, heartless and even cruel. Physical beatings are meted on the children which Sister Luisa claims “is doing God’s work” (30). The children live in appalling conditions and survive on the sparsest rations of food and clothing. Many are crippled and they generally “considered an eyesore and a nuisance by a government bent on promoting tourism” (34). The attitude of the children towards the sisters did not reflect a loving connection but they were instead described in their uniforms as appearing like a “piece of dough” (27), while Sister Luisa’s “expression was the same as the ones carved into demon masks” (27).

Karodia through this narrative lends her voice to how religion could have been more effective and applicable to the receiving communities. Many years later, Faith is sponsored by a wealthy Portuguese woman to a ‘proper’ education at a Catholic convent to learn to communicate in sign language. Living with the nuns perhaps suggests a cultural inclusiveness which often lacked and would permitted more successful dealings with the locals.

Faith, the protagonist in *A Shattering of Silence* begins by explaining how “the writing had been a form of therapy which helped immensely with the recovery of my memory” (1). There is immediately a bond between her and the

author who also uses writing as a therapy to ‘break the silence’ as victims of a society where political upheavals and violence and wreaked havoc on lives.

## **2.7 Afrindian Context**

Rastogi, in attempting to account for the surge of Indian writing in South Africa in the last two decades since the demise of apartheid, asserts that South African Indians in their quest for cultural identity strongly desire South African citizenship. Prior to this, there was no place they could claim national belonging until they asserted an “Afrindian” identity, a term he suggests is “both an Africanization of Indian selfhood and an Indianization of South Africa” (*introduction*).

Effectively, Rastogi’s analysis serves two purposes: to trace the specificity of the Indian presence in South Africa and secondly, to fill the gap in critical studies on South African Indian fiction. He argues that South African Indians resist being cast in the role of Indian diasporics but rather “are actively engaged in the life of the nation, consciously identifying as South Africans first and Indians next despite their relative anonymity in the national spectrum” (12).

Apartheid, however, prevented much scholarship on Indians in South Africa because they occupied “a middle place in a dichotomous racial model that had no room for shades of gray, both in its oppressive and oppositional modes” (10). In other words, the concerns of Indian identity could not be accommodated in the grand narrative of the freedom struggle “that sought to incorporate all

nonwhites people under a singular “black” identity forged by the commonality of white oppression” (11).

Rastogi further decries how there is very little literary scholarship available on Indians in South Africa even though they have been narrating their stories since they were transported from India as indentured labour in the mid nineteenth century. An analysis of Indian fiction, however, from the 1970s onward, reveals many of the concerns of mainstream South African literary discourse articulated by writers such as J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Alex La Guma, Zakes Mda among others. Their themes reflects, as Attwell points out: “certain dynamics of South African society, such as tensions between the generations, class divisions and aspirations, political alliances, clashing accounts of tradition, and so on” (180) as well as the themes of oppression under apartheid, racial solidarity and anxieties about the new nation.

South African Indian writers include Farouk Asvat, Shabbir Banoobhai, Achmat Dangor, Ahmed Essop, Reshard Gool, Farida Karodia, Indres, Naidoo, Deena Pahayachee, Essop Patel, Shobna Poona and Jayapraga Reddy. Despite their presence, Rastogi states, “scholarship still has enormous holes to fill in its knowledge of this oeuvre ... and [d]espite the proliferation of texts studying South African literature in more inclusive ways, the works of South African Indian writers remain neglected” (12).

The central concern that dominates South African Indian fiction is the Indian relationship with blacks – the positive as well as negative aspects. These

include problems of identity such as establishing links with the black population while preserving Indianness, locating oneself within a binary of black-white racial formulation and the theme of longing for belonging. It is “concerned with describing Indian relationships with black Africans, tracing racial solidarity in the apartheid period, and mourning its rupture in the post apartheid period” (15).

## **2.8 Invention and Feminine Style**

It is necessary at this stage to link Karodia’s summons of history to thoughts of invention by Foucault who holds that synthesis is essential to invention, in this case, a synthesis of fact and fiction:

It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or "manufactures" something that does not as yet exist, that is, "fictions" it. One "fictions" history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one "fictions" a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth (193).

The new politics of the black woman’s oppression of race, class and sex requires writing that “fictions” into existence a politics in their favour. This synthesis is necessary to invention and may take a variety of forms. Other such synthesis is work that successfully combines the poetic and the rhetorical, and/or

argumentation and emotion. All such writings exploit pre-existing symbolic resources to create what Campbell sees as the strategic use of “feminine style” (17). It has also been called a model of female discourse and a conversation among equals, as Marcus observes, a “trio-logue” among the woman writer, the woman students in the audience and the woman reader. (146, 148)

## **2.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter set out to delineate the specific socio-economic conditions that shaped the lives of black women in the apartheid period. The few women who were positioned to write, we have established, did so in spite of numerous odds. These odds discussed include how history place the black woman at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, subordinate in the apartheid struggle and denied means of self-expression. Consequently, the act of writing as well as the emergent voice of their writing displayed a defiance that ensured they were not omitted from history and showed their resilience in fighting the forces that would mute and exclude them.

Finally, the discussion located Karodia’s mixed Indian/coloured heritage and its significance to the study in providing a marginalized perspective that captures the spirit of the apartheid struggle. The historical setting of Chapter Two provides the background for the next chapter that will isolate black women’s concerns that require a language that clearly expresses them.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IDENTIFYING A DISTINCTIVE VOICE

*From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art*

**Michel Foucault**

#### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter, as stated in the second objective of this study, is to create a link between the social oppressions of black women and a writing style that identifies with their particular situation. In Chapter Two we outlined how historical conditions worked to oppress the black woman. With the ending of apartheid, the black woman had now to give voice to the new oppressions and ensure that her writing was faithful in presenting her experiences while creating her in new light.

We will attempt to define the nature of the contemporary black female voice that traces its roots to the apartheid regime. The taming of the social and racial legacies of apartheid has placed the spotlight on the interpersonal and psychological dimensions of oppression where women now take their place in the world as gendered subjects. This voice emerges to fill the ‘gender-gap’ of post apartheid writing that is dominated by whites and males to go beyond its earlier



defiance to begin exploring questions such as, “what is a woman? What is being a woman and what is the nature of womanhood?” (Leslie 14). Analyzing Karodia’s voice will lead us to explore aspects of the form and content of her narratives with the aim of determining if indeed her voice is distinctive and, if so, what are the conspicuous aspects of her black woman’s writing.

### **3.2 New Oppressions, New Voices**

This section addresses the challenges facing the black woman in the new dispensation and finds basis for why change does not guarantee a voice to a majority of them. The racial, gender and class hierarchies enforced and endorsed during the apartheid regime continue to have profound implications for black women even as rights-based principles come into effect to dismantle or transform social stratification. Though the umbrella of oppressive social order may have altered, women still find themselves under the control of longstanding structures at the base units of society of which Burman states “phenomena of repression or exclusion have their instruments and their logic at the effective level of the family, of the immediate environment, of the most basic units of society” (7).

In effect, the consequences of apartheid and the struggle against it persist: apartheid destroyed families, perverted traditional hierarchies of power and communities were destroyed through the segregationist acts. Consequently, the violence of the past is exhibited everyday through crime, gender-based violence and sexual violence. Women continue to live in appalling social and economic

conditions, especially in the rural areas where poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition are at high levels (Swartz 14).

While legislature and policy swing into place to attempt to correct social imbalances, black women writers, such as Karodia write to give voice to a South African existence invisible and represented only by statistics. In the post apartheid situation where most black women experience varying degrees of social oppression, voice goes beyond the notion of a person's point of view to encompass the experiences of both empowerment and powerlessness that pervades an individual's life. Belenky and Goldberger argue:

Voice is a metaphor that can apply to many aspects of women's experience and development. In describing their lives, women commonly talked about voice and silence: 'speaking up,' 'speaking out,' 'being silenced,' 'not being heard,' 'really listening,' 'really talking,' 'words as weapons,' 'feeling deaf and dumb,' 'having no words,' 'saying what you mean,' 'listening to be heard' .... (18)

For black women who have been marginalized for most of their lives, developing a voice and thoughts, outside of the hegemonic discourse they had become conditioned to, is an intricate process. Bakhtin explains that, "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of

others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (qtd.in Brown 106).

### **3.3 Locating a Distinctive Post-apartheid Voice**

The dilemma of black women's writing in South Africa is that it operates on the periphery of the literary scene. The evidence of patriarchal forces of suppression is in women's illiteracy rates, their difficulty in getting into print and even the critical devaluing of what they do produce. It is for these reasons that feminist criticism often refers to women's writing as "silenced" and "absent". Those writers who have braved the hurdles of illiteracy and the entanglements of female obligations contend with being unknown and unread. Their impact today, as in the past, is muted by the more popular and readily published works of white writers and men.

Audre Lorde articulates an action plan as she entreats women to partner with the female artist, "And where the words of women are crying out to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives"(11). Women writers have told many female truths and will continue to do so. And many of them struggle with language and thoughts that are not organized in a way that the majority of readers are familiar with. After all, as Gillman observes, they use a language they have not created (qtd in Todd 4). Language use in the past served the purposes of the politics of apartheid, an agenda shared only for a

moment in history. Leclerc states that working language and working politics cannot be subdivided "... to invent a woman's language. But a language different from that of the women who are named in the language of men. Any woman seeking a discourse of her own cannot escape from a task of the first importance: she has to invent woman" (qtd in Todd 14). (*underline mine for emphasis*)

What women writers are doing, nose to the task, is inventing woman. Often it is disordered, sentimental and cliché-ridden but more frequently, women's insights, women's problems and their most individual ventures cannot be contained by the artist who feels deeply. Despite the contempt shown to their writing, Tilney observes that, "a general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar" (qtd in Todd 2). Tilney seeking to understand a female text needs to go beyond the linguistic tangle and instead listen to the women's voice.

The pertinent question of whether there is a distinctive female voice always ends with a non-definitive answer. There is the school of thought, as argued by Joyce Carol Oates (qtd in Todd 14), against the notion of a distinctive female style. She holds that a good writer will transcend all categories of content, form and gender to concentrate on developing an individual style. According to her, this style must be sexless.

Related to this is the notion that one takes the risk of listening to women's voice only with the full knowledge that they write using a craft developed by others and often presents what Todd calls "qualities that yield no message female

writers wish to frame” (2). While emphasizing the imperfections and all, Todd further argues: “the critic must catch it alone and, interrogating the surface blots and fears, try to locate a distinctive voice – if indeed, with its upbringing, there is one at all” (3). In other words, because the women writer cannot match her male counterpart on merit, affirmative action should be instigated to allow her access to the alien medium.

This leads us to concur with Jacobus who sees the labelling of the woman writer as limiting:

To label a text as that of a woman, and to write about it for that reason makes vividly legible what the critical institution has either ignored or acknowledged only under the sign of inferiority. We need the term ‘women’s writing’ if only to remind us of the social conditions under which women wrote and still write (39).

Our position on the distinct female voice, therefore, is not to engage at the level of language practice, but more pertinently at the woman’s ability to elevate the unique experiences of woman and the knowledge gained from those experiences. Carolyn Heilbrun explains how women writers must work to tear away from an imposed identity and are tasked with defining what it is to be female. Heilbrun maintains that:

Woman's most persistent problem has been to discover for herself an identity not limited by custom or defined by attachment to some man. Remarkably, her search for identity has been even less successful within the world of fiction than outside it, leaving us until recently with a situation largely unchanged for more than two millennia: men writers have created women characters with autonomy, with a self that is not ancillary, not described by a relationship—wife, mother, daughter, mistress, chief assistant (18).

Women must take on what male writers have been doing. Indeed, that men strive to present believable female characters is worthy of merit, however, this is a task that must not be left to men. Women best understand their own value system and with them is vested the power to question what it means to be a woman. Jacobus goes further to delineate the particularized place that women occupy in the social structure which allows them to “write as women without writing as Woman” (39). The space that women writers must occupy is that of providing perspective as opposed to highlighting gender inequality.

Assessing Karodia, in this light, therefore, is to query how effectively she presents, corrects, re-imagines, and defines the world and spaces inhabited by black women. Countering and challenging the worldview of others becomes a component of the intricate formula she appropriates to achieve the objective of inventing woman.

### **3.4 Feminine Conditions Feminine Forms**

In this section, we examine Karodia's writings in the context of womanist theory in order to explain her world of women. We will also attempt to locate Karodia's voice through both the conditions she creates for women and in her forms of expression. The Womanist perspective employed in this study stations Karodia as one of a growing group of black writers who are particularly concerned with black women's historical, cultural, social, economic, and political realities. In unison with scholars, these writers confront the ongoing challenge to develop a language that describes an autonomous, practical, community-focused way of knowing. One important aspect of Womanist theory is the need to clarify the multiple roles that black women play in the struggle for the survival of the black community and in the struggle for institutional change (Collins 5).

This perspective is particularly useful to this study of voice in that Womanist theory examines the interlocking hierarchies of gender, race and class and the challenges of identifying and articulating the woman's voice in society, "We must act with deliberation and commitment in order to ensure that all women have a voice and an audience for the telling of their lives" ( Etter-Lewis 19).

In our exploration of voice to reveal Karodia's definition of what it is to be female, the viewpoint of Walby becomes useful. She articulates that 'patriarchy' is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality. Her definition of patriarchy, notably, is different from that of other feminist. She argues that there are six

patriarchal structures which restrict women and help maintain male domination. These are: paid work, patriarchal relations within the household, patriarchal culture, sexuality, male violence towards women and lastly, the state. The existence of the structures, she argues, restricts the choices that women in particular can make. These structures will provide benchmarks to the attitudes under study.

In light of the above preamble, we refine our task to query “if there is a woman’s voice, how do we recognize it?” How do we acknowledge gender difference to explain characters in terms of their being female or how they relate to femininity? George Elliot asserts that the distinctively feminine conditions must give rise to distinctive forms and combinations. In other words, content – the writers’ experiences, worldview and peculiarities - inevitably determines structure and style. Helen Jacey provides four structural devices that can help one locate the woman’s voice and which we can employ in this analysis of Karodia’s voice. She suggests that voice can be discerned in a writer’s use of characters, choice of world, use of conflict and use of union.

### **3.4.1 Karodia’s Voice in *Character Choice***

Farida Karodia chooses both male and female characters as protagonists her stories. The larger percentage of these characters, however, are women and it is through this creative process of women leading figures that she explores - consciously or unconsciously – her own attitudes about women. Karodia from her



vantage point doesn't see women for their differences but for the faculty that allows them to experience as women. Ann Jones echoes this point of entry into women's lives:

If we remember that what women really share is an oppression on all levels, although it affects each in different ways – if we can translate *feminite* into a concerted attack not only on language, but also directly upon the sociosexual arrangements that keep us from our own potentials and from each other. (261)

For example, her choice of Katrina in “The Red Velvet Dress”, a coloured girl raised by white parents during the apartheid years, reveals the author's attitudes and values to be incredulous of situations only apartheid could have allowed a woman to endure alone. Karodia's own mixed raced heritage comes into play as she attempts to inject the bewilderment and disorder that she herself must have endured into the life of her character Katrina who refuses to be mollified by half-truths.

Karodia subsequently takes her leading character on a journey in search of identity and belonging. Karodia gives her protagonist choices in her situation and her young character ultimately pays the negative consequences for those choices. The story of Katrina symbolizes the emotional and physical wounds inflicted by incest, social humiliation and ridicule that ravage a woman's soul. And while Karodia concedes that the impact of the wounds has the capacity to linger for

years, she depicts the heroine with the female resiliency evident in the culture: A woman, in spite of her experiences is never bereft of courage.

Another journey that Karodia invites the reader to partake of is that of the life of Flora in “Getting Through the Night” It is the story of an African woman living in the poor urban townships and struggling to make a life for herself and her daughter. As stated elsewhere, Karodia does not limit herself to characters from only her Asian/Coloured community, but attempts to express the world view of all South Africans. In particular, her Asian roots are of particular significance to the study because she represents a minority perspective on the concerns of an oppressed majority. Karodia’s choice, therefore, of Flora and not a middle class and privileged woman, is representative of the culture’s view of the average woman.

Flora’s journey gives us a microcosmic view of her life as she agonizingly waits for her daughter Tandi to return from a night out. During those few hours, Flora searches into her past and present and through this we are able to explore the author’s attitude towards women and femininity. Flora represents women who are disillusioned that the end of apartheid did not bring about meaningful change. They believe that their struggle for freedom had all been in vain:

Change, obviously, was out there, but she, like others, had no idea how it was going to affect her life. She had no expectations because she knew, despite the political reforms, her struggle would

continue. It was an interminable struggle to survive. It was a struggle to eat, to pay the rent, to find a job, to educate the children and to buy the few necessities that would make life a little easier.

(80)

As a single mother, victimization by powerful forces is a daily reality, while protection from the community and the state is not forthcoming. For all intents and purposes, Flora and her plight are obscured on the social radar. Karodia's attitude to Flora's situation expresses an awareness of the forgotten and defenceless of society. A black single woman living in the townships represents the new voiceless – poor, uneducated and vulnerable – whose story speaks of women stripped of their defiance and left battling the invisible and unending nature of poverty.

Whether single or married, mothers have to bear the commitment of child rearing during the first 18 years of life, rendering it an arduous task for women to compete on equal terms in the labour market or to try to fight for greater equality. Smart states that:

Motherhood has been identified as a source of women's oppression because of the burdens and responsibilities of solitary care, the opportunity costs of caring and leaving the work-force, and the association of child care with menial tasks and limited abilities... (but also) motherhood has been seen as a source of women's

strength and uniqueness, a site that is entirely feminine and that draws upon women's special qualities and knowledge. Thus motherhood has been seen in realist terms, which is to say as an actuality from which women draw strength and oppositional politics can derive. (qtd in Silva 273)

In many societies today, poverty goes hand in hand with the almost permanent absence of biological fathers from home. Father absence is of particular concern for poor families, for whom men's contributions could make a real difference in pulling children out of poverty. In South Africa, 52% of children under the age of 18 do not live with their biological fathers (Desmond and Desmond 13). In the narrative "Getting through the Night", Karodia gives space for a single mother's voice to be heard and taken seriously creating the possibility for her situation to escape the straitjacket of male thought and male modern language.

The story of a single mother raising her daughter in the poverty and insecurity of a South African township is certainly a tale expressing the female experience in a female language. Florah is not just another statistic in the lot of unwed mothers struggling to make ends meet. Instead, her story which takes us through just one night of her agony as she awaits her daughter to return from a night out, is one that lures us in to understand the circumstances under which she finds herself locked, and experience every emotion that she undergoes as a woman. If male truth is arrived at through the detached impersonal use of logic,

female conception of truth is linked more to experience and negotiation with others. Karodia communicates in a distinctly feminine way that disallows aloofness.

Sweeping generalities classify single mothers as irresponsible for not enhancing society's economic resources and for being morally reprehensible. Karodia's single mother and her daughter certainly live a life of hardship:

The house was a small two-roomed structure, rented for the past five years from the Mpandhlanis. She and Tandi shared the bedroom; the other room with its hot-plate and small fridge was used as a kitchen-cum-living-room. There was no bathroom or running water. They washed at an out-side tap and bathed in a galvanized tub dragged into the kitchen twice a week. The lavatory was outside in the yard, a wooden structure with a pit. (75)

Contemporary political and moral discourses construct single motherhood as a deserved status. By rendering these women as mere social statistics, their individual story is unheard and as Katherine Woodward underscores: "increasingly, the experience of actual women matters less than the figures represented" (261).

"Getting through the Night" conveys the actual experience of Florah and her daughter and underscores their story with the emotion that the women endure daily. As the title of the story suggests, Florah has learnt to live one day at a time,

by following the natural rhythm of nature to plot a course. Such an attitude of perseverance to a situation with no possible retreat and without obvious solutions could only be endured by a woman. Without a destination she still found courage to plod on:

Change, obviously, was out there, but she, like others, had no idea how it was going to affect her life. She had no expectations because she knew, despite the political reforms, her struggle would continue, it was an interminable struggle to survive. It was a struggle to eat, to pay the rent, to find a job, to educate the children and to buy the few necessities that would make life a little easier. Change was out there, but not for her or the likes of her (80).

Karodia constructs the caring mother in the context of firstly, the changing times of family breakdown - her second husband “Steven had abandoned them” (80). Secondly, women’s participation in the labour market – (It was not so easy to deal with her daughter when) “she got home after a long day at work, exhausted and hungry” (78) and thirdly, the relentless post-apartheid insecurity – “In the townships, violence had displaced childhood. Parents, stripped of authority, watched helplessly as streets became territorial trophies in tribal and gang-style wars” (76). It is this preoccupation with a generation “weaned on

violence” that plants an insurmountable barrier between herself and her politicized and radical daughter. Florah identifies herself not as a single mother, but as a parent to an errant and wilful child. Her experience is like that of many other parents:

‘Dear God, it takes too much to be a parent these days,’ she muttered. ‘Too much.’ It takes too much to live, Florah thought. It takes too much determination. It takes too much effort, too much endurance. It had worn her out. Sometimes she felt like stretching out on the bed and holding her breath until she quietly slipped away. A painless death would be preferable to the constant paralysis caused by fear. (84)

Indeed, only a mother could endure the anguish of raising a child knowing not whether they will live to see tomorrow. Florah’s commitment to her calling is vividly enacted in the stylistic punctuation of the passing of time drawn out by the author. Farida Karodia sets the story in just one evening as Florah experiences torturous insomnia as she waits for her daughter till the wee hours of the morning. With every paragraph of information that sheds light on Florah’s past and present life, there is the constant reminder of the passing of time: “It was still five past twelve” (74), “It was twenty past twelve” (75), “It was ten minutes to one”(76), “It was ten past one” (79), “It was half past one” (81), ‘It was quarter past two”

(83), “It was half past two” (84). This repetition persistently returns us to the present moment and her current predicament.

Is Florah but another over-protective mother with idle time on her hands to micro-manage her daughter’s every move? If for a second the reader might have been quick to judge the single mother as lonely and perhaps in need of company, the chilling news that Tandi eventually brings home of the fatal shooting of their family friend validates the mother’s every fear. The roulette wheel of fate, assuredly, would continue its spin as she comforts her daughter today:

‘Hush, Baby. Hush,’ Florah said, her tears flowing too, for Mrs Makabane who had lost her son. Afterwards, Florah helped Tandi into bed. What mattered for the moment was that Tandi was alive and well and that another hellish night had ended in the township.

(86)

The characterization of a mother as represented by Florah is portrayed primarily as being accompanied by poverty. This is drawn in stark contrast to a white middle class and affluent mother who are inclined to ‘have it all’. Black mothers like Florah are marginalized and unheard. Her range of choices, as we have seen, are also few. Farida Karodia presents new ways of thinking about motherhood as an identity and a place from which mothers can speak. Perhaps the single most important conclusion we can make of this subject is that, as Katherine Woodward observes, “dependence on a man is not presented as the solution to the



problems of single parenthood” (271). When Florah finally lays to rest at the end of that long gruelling night, she has no illusions that tomorrow will promise a better outcome. Her only constant is that she will go through it all again, “ She turned on to her side and, wedging her hands under her cheeks, determinedly closed her eyes, but it was impossible to sleep knowing that within a matter of two hours, the alarm would go off, marking the beginning of yet another day” (86).

Karodia’s representation of motherhood is a commitment to the challenge of providing alternatives to the figures of motherhood that are otherwise constraining and negative. The portrayal of Florah in “Getting through the Night” breaks the barrier that Woodward calls: “the single mother as cause of social problems or as victim (that) does not offer an empowering or an enabling identity for women” (261). Even had her daughter Tandi been brought up in ‘normal stable family’ the socio-cultural context would render easy solutions elusive. Florah, the caring and dedicated parent, is first and foremost a mother and praise and recognition is due to her for enduring the cycles as only a woman can. She exemplifies how “women’s lives are experienced, in so many areas as cycles – diurnal cycles of nurturance and preparation of food, cycles of caring, cleansing and the annual cycles of family life” (Haste 54). Other socially constructed adjectives such as ‘single’ are secondary.

Another strongly portrayed character is that of Sushi in “Crossmatch”. From a Hindu family, Sushi had turned into a rebel and rejected the choices that

her parents had made for her. Instead she became an actor, secretly had an English boyfriend and resisted marriage and the lifestyle of a 'proper' Hindu girl. This did not go down well with her parents:

Her mother...feared that Sushi had grown apart from them and that it was too late to bridge the gap. Sushi knew that her mother worried about her. Her mother had this idea that everyone living abroad, and particularly in London, lived a debauched lifestyle...It was difficult for her to watch her youngest daughter drifting beyond her sphere of influence. Even more difficult was the possibility that Sushi might have abandoned her Hindu traditions (89-90).

While Sushi represents the rejection of traditional values, she also stands for a questioning spirit as to what defines womanhood in this male dominated world. The oppressed and unhappy life of her married older sister did little to inspire Sushi about traditional marriage:

Indira was silent, uncomfortable both physically and emotionally. She swung her legs off the bed, looking so miserable, so unhappy, that Sushi could only feel sorry for her. Indira had leaped directly into marriage. She had never had the opportunity to explore her potential, to see what she was capable of, or to determine her own worth (106).

Karodia takes her character Sushi on a journey where her parents attempt to match-make her with a potential suitor. In the end, Sushi succeeds in evading marriage yet again and her independent stance is apparently rewarded. Through her, Karodia upholds independent thinking and provides alternatives for women outside of cultural practices.

### **3.4.2 Karodia's Voice in *Choice of World***

The world that Karodia sets her stories in, and that her women inhabit, is a strong indicator of her reflections about women's lives and the societal expectations of them in terms of roles, behaviour and values. Gayl Jones makes the distinction between the work of black male writers and black women writers where the former choose themes of relationships involving the confrontation of individuals outside the family and community. For black women writers as Tate, however, the focus is on complex and significant relations within family and community, between men and women, and among women (92).

In *Other Secrets*, for example, Karodia sets her apartheid era story about two Indian/Coloured sisters in the home environment and their places of work. The tribulations they undergo render their existence unbearable and it is from that world that these young women desire to escape. Yasmin, the older daughter tries to avoid an arranged marriage by pleading to attend boarding school. Her escapist tendency, however, leads to a relationship with a white boy who rapes her – for

which there was no possibility of justice. Soon after she gives birth to a girl whom she abandons with her family as she departs for London.

Meena, her younger sister, escapes into the world of romantic novels and either because of the isolation of their lives or the unreal world of apartheid, she identifies more with the lives of her fictional heroines. Later, Meena gets a teaching job for which she is forced to reclassify her race from Asian to coloured in order to keep her position in the coloured school. She abhors that she has to alter her identity in order to earn a living. She, too, soon leaves for London.

While the female adults – mother and grandmother – struggle for survival and strive to give a meaning to their life, the younger generation nurse the desire to break free. Ma ensures her daughters are educated in order that they not be enslaved to anyone. Her expectations are that they fit into arranged, probably loveless marriages, and manage their hopes and despair in the confinements of apartheid.

Because of their Muslim/Christian dichotomy of mixed parentage, they encounter questions of ethnic purity. The young women are often placed in conflicting situations and dilemmas that form barriers to their self-realisation and ultimately the quest for happiness. Indeed, the world of *Other Secrets* that Karodia creates is particularly hostile to women. They are trapped by the web of apartheid and the secrets they must keep. Yet the young female characters are tough, determined and defiant in their actions. We meet once again with a female defiance but in this instance, informed by an allegiance to no particular culture or

way of life. The girls create their own identity by virtue of belonging to none in particular and this of itself creates a hybrid life offering possibilities.

In her creative processes, Karodia creates worlds that cut across class and race boundaries. In “Billy”, the history of Harry and Rose Steenkamp is set post apartheid in the mining town of Port Nolloth where they live with their mentally retarded eighteen year old son. And the world she depicts is a less than perfect world in numerous ways. They subsist on Harry’s pension which he received after a mining accident. Rose, in her 70s, has cancer and she single-handedly cares for the two dependent men in her life. Despite her challenges, she is expected to fulfil the roles of caregiver and backbone of the family. Like Flora in “Getting Through the Night”, Rose has no audience for the difficulties in her circumstances. Traditional forms of support and community are gone and she must create new bonds.

One particular value of the society that emerges is the rejection of any form of weakness; age, ailing health, financial insecurity, dependence. All of these are manifested in the Steenkamp household and although it breeds a sadness and loneliness within Rose, it also creates a sense of peace and assurance that even in her absence, Billy and her husband will learn to depend on each other and those around them. Karodia uses this narrative to illustrate how the harsh economic realities of the new South Africa continue to victimize black women in their worlds.

For most parents who have children in the later years of their lives, they can expect to have them as dependants for an increased length of time. In the case of Rose, she was guaranteed of lifetime tenure of being a full-time mother. And it wasn't getting any easier:

(Billy understood) that his mother sometimes snapped because she was getting on in years. . . He knew his Ma and Pa had white hair and lots of wrinkles and that the top of his Pa's head looked almost like his belly – big, bald and shiny – but otherwise the fact that his Ma was sixty-four and his Pa seventy-six meant nothing to him. 62

Harry's accident at work when he was still in his prime left Rose with the burden of the family's well-being. He was partially paralyzed and the small pension from the diamond company he had worked for formed their subsistence. Idling away his time watching TV and reading left Rose frustrated with his unhelpful habits. With two dependants in this harsh economic climate, Rose is stoic in her response. Karodia paints motherhood at its most enduring, "When she was still struggling with Harry and Billy and trying to make sense of her life, she longed for a bit of peace and quiet. . . Rose never complained to Harry, never burdened him" (58).

The general economic climate in the post-apartheid nation is described with much gloom by Mrs. Da Silva, a friend who runs a shop near their home. She describes a town with little economic activity, few jobs, retrenchments and

people living on “hopes and dreams, that’s all we got left” (63). She testifies to the life of fantasy that most people have resorted to: “Nowadays the only things that sell here are the scratch-and-win (lottery) tickets and alcohol” (63). As though having a dependant child and a pensioned husband is not enough for the ageing mother, Rose also has a secret that weighs heavily on her heart. And to add to the pressure, it is only a matter of time before the issue gets out of hand:

Dear God, what’ll happen to Billy one day?’ she whispered.

‘What’ll happen to him when I am gone?’ Rose suppressed a sob as she watched him for a few moments longer. How would he survive? With an anguished sigh, she turned off the light. . . Rose could not sleep. The pain came and went, not as bad as it usually was, but it was there as a constant reminder about this thing growing inside her. Rose had cancer of the stomach and it had spread. Not even her husband Harry knew . . . The doctor had said they would have to remove most of her stomach. She didn’t want to worry Harry. . . She worried about how Harry and Billy would manage without her. 68.

The story “Billy” is a poignant tale of a retarded boy who, because of his limited faculties, lacks the capacity to live neither in the past nor the future. Instead he exhibits a childlike faith in the present wherein he finds alternative solutions to life. Though Billy represents life with all its possibilities, the hero of

the narrative is Rose his mother. She is a woman to whom life has played an impossible hand and against whom, it seems, the forces have conspired. Her salvation, however, will lie in both her feminine experience and understanding of the world as well as in her interpretation of her son's capacity to survive in a seemingly hostile world.

Karodia metaphorically constructs the life of Rose to demonstrate how women experience their lives differently from men. Haste believes that it is problematic to articulate and appreciate female experiences through a language dominated by men, and particularly by male metaphors. According to her, metaphors such as 'Man the Hunter' reinforce dualisms of public vs. private spheres where men dominate one and women are confined to the other. Haste is critical of this dualistic thinking which encourages some women to strive to be more rational and less emotional or to emphasize the achievement of goals rather than the enjoyment of experience. Essentially, Haste argues that "there are distinctive and equally valid feminine ways of interpreting the world" (11).

Karodia sees the value of deconstructing linguistic concepts typically regarded in a positive way and reinterpreting their opposites in a positive light. In the story "Billy" she turns conventional thinking on its head by portraying the dependent and socially challenged Billy not as weak and burdensome, but as a sensitive human being experiencing the world on his own terms and with extremely desirable characteristics. He is loving, protective and exceptionally



tuned to the needs of those around him. His heroic moment in Mrs. Da Silva's shop was an instinctive response to an obligation:

In front of her, stood a man, pointing a gun at her. Billy knew only that the gun was a bad thing. He had seen how it had killed people on the TV. Billy did the only thing he could do. Still holding the tin of beans in his right hand, he threw his arm back, took two steps forward and swung his arm through a perfect arc. The tin struck the man's arm and the gun flew out of his hand. The man yelped in pain, grasping his forearm. Startled, both Billy and the man watched the gun slither across the floor . . . then the man pushed past him and fled. 71

Farida Karodia takes a mother's less-than-ideal condition – a husband who will not take charge, a retarded child and a time-bound cancerous condition – to deconstruct an aggravated motherhood. Rose had but given up on transforming their lives through the lottery, yet by the time she was in the ambulance on her way to the hospital, she had negotiated a peaceful truce with her circumstances. Not much had changed, but her interpretation of Billy's ability to cope with life was the new wisdom she had gained, thus, "She saw Harry's face as he glanced at his son and the look of adoration Billy gave his father. Suddenly she had a sense that everything would be all right, that Harry would be there for Billy as long as he could" (72).

It is her friend who confirms this new truth: “Don’t worry about Billy!” Mrs da Silva called. “I’ll take care of him” (72). Rose’s motherhood experience reflects a woman’s highest prerogative, the exercising of individual agency and on this occasion it was about allocating meaning to data she had interpreted. Where male experience would seek to achieve an identified solution through the use of logic to such a predicament, Rose instead gains a new female conception of truth through her subjective experience, negotiation with others and as Haste underscores

Persuasion – the recognition of the other person’s point of view and the accommodation of one’s arguments to that point of view – is essential for comprehension and the development of ideas (3).

Karodia’s choice of world is also evident in her stylistic preferences. The writer’s choice of words when she describes nature, the landscape and its connection with the human spirit presents a quality that connects truthfully with one’s sense of timelessness. Johan in “Against an African Sky” introduces the narrative with this reflection, “Somewhere, embedded deep down in my consciousness, had always been the feeling that some day I would return to South Africa. Images of the veld and the colour of the African sky had haunted me throughout the years I was abroad” (1).

Karodia, if nothing else, believes in what nature has proffered through its enduring quality to speak to man’s resilient spirit. Though nature would

sometimes be indifferent, it ultimately is the one shared experience in a land that thrived on separate-ness:

As far as the eye could see, from one horizon to the next and beyond, the veld seemed to stretch endlessly under the African sky; the red soil, with its stubble of short, tough Karoo bush, was baked under the relentless sun. Stark and exposed, the land seemed to lie passive and arid ... There is a unique quality of light here. It has an iridescence and a depth of colour ... At dusk, however, the land lies bleak and desolate ... The landscape itself, which seems so forbidding and monotonous to those who are unfamiliar with it, is a constant source of wonder to those who know it, who have grown up on it, who have felt its power under the soles of their bare feet.

18

The narrator declares its universal quality in unmistakable form: “For Sissie it is a place from which she had gathered her strength. For me it was a place of refuge in my childhood” (18). Karodia’s word choice and sentence structure makes the presence of nature an integral part of her art form, “The memories of the veld comfort me,” Sissie said. ‘The tempo of the land and its endless cycles of seasons and farm activity matched the cycles of my own life’ (18).

### 3.4.3. Karodia's Voice in *Use of Conflict*

A majority of Karodia's stories reflect an elevated level of internal conflict. For female characters, internal conflict generally signifies ambivalence over the roles and expectations upon them as women. Conflict in Karodia's works begins with identifying a character's gender-specific form of internal antagonism. For Flora in "Getting through the Night", for example, it is her daughter Tandi who causes her anguish with her rebellious, independent ways. Flora desires to give her daughter a better lifestyle, but she is also cognisant of the fact that conditions are pathetic and they will remain so. Hence, her internal struggle of mixed emotions towards her daughter causing her to swing between loving and hating her own child. Karodia's depicts Flora as conflicted as she reconsiders the choices she had made as a mother: She compares her lifestyle and choices with those of her neighbour and friend Doris:

Doris the paradox: the tough and ruthless businesswoman, and the loving, patient parent to Pauline. Florah sometimes thought, if she had been more like Doris, things might have been easier between her and Tandi ...

Doris, who ran a shabeen ... was a woman of independent means, her independence gained from men who were trapped in their need for alcohol. Despite her loathing of that style of life, Florah never criticised her friend. 77

Karodia, in this instance, points to the demands made of women to live up to the expectations of her daughter and society, yet she could not – unlike Doris – support the lifestyle demands of selling alcohol. The only alternative for Florah is the life she endures where she, “... return(s) late at night, heart pounding so hard with terror on the long walk home that there was hardly enough strength to put one foot in front of the other” (77). Florah makes the choice to live right by her personal standards and not aim to please the people around her – not even her demanding daughter.

In “Crossmatch”, we encounter struggles of a different nature in the Asian family. The older married sister Indira conflicts with her husband who would have her abort their second child if the sex is female. His long absences are linked to this and her anguish lies in his blackmailing her to have his way. Sushi, too, locates her personal antagonism in others’ expectations of her. Her parents would have her change her single status, her job, her attire and even her attitude. These all become constant sources of conflict in the home. Sushi, in all regards, is strong willed and though she loves and respects her parents, will not give up her acting career nor marry their choice of a partner. This conflict has resulted in her absences from home in order to avoid the disapproval. Karodia creates conflict to revolve around a character’s need to protect their sense of identity, their most central defining point in relation to self and others.

This is particularly evident in the character of Sissie, a medical doctor, in “Against an African Sky.” Working in a male dominated field she battles constant denigration from them as a black woman doctor:

Because I’m a woman some of my black colleagues patronise me. Yet, they consider themselves thoroughly modern. I often have to stop them, to say: Hey *wetu*, don’t treat me like that! ... Sometimes it makes me so damn mad. But what can one do? There’s no point complaining, is there? We just have to get in there and change things. I’ve a bellyful of “attitude” (40).

Karodia draws Sissie as knowing her mind and one who does not allow others to make demands of her. As a woman, not only do men have a problem seeing her as an equal but so also do the locals who are yet to put their confidence into modern medicine and modern women doctors.

Conflict informs the decisions that Rose in “Billy” has to make. Karodia makes a hero of Rose in that in her decisions concerning her family and her health she does the right thing for herself and her own personal survival, rather than feigning strength and sacrificing herself for others. Rose embarks on journey which is extremely interior and personal, though from the outside it might be judged as passive. Conflict is used equally convincingly in “In the Name of Love” to portray the world of Ali’s grandmother, Dadima, who as the matriarch of the family makes key decisions on the family business. Her son, however, lacks

integrity in business and in his personal life and because he will inherit the business, Dadima has conflicting emotions and must make colossal decisions.

Dadima uses her life skills and values gained from being a mother to wisely intervene when her son insists on selling family property. She balances this with her role of businesswoman and decision-maker to deal with the crushing disappointment inflicted by a deceptive son. Karodia's voice here speaks of the enormity of Dadima's challenge as the central figure around which the entire family revolves. Should she give in to the greed of her oldest son and which will lead to the loss of the only family property left, or should she stand up to him, and fight her son to the bitter end? She begins with the truth:

Is being in jail something to be proud of? You have cheated people. Who can believe anything you say? You are such a liar. You lie to your wife, to your children and to yourself. Have you no shame. Now you come here and you want to bring shame on this house too. (163)

Dadima opts to put an end to anything that would tear the family apart and cause feuding. She gives in to his demands and allows him to sell the family property. She explains to her grandson:

What is money to me, anyway? I can't take it with me and your father will not have a moment of peace until he has it all. He's been wanting to take the property for years. He knows how valuable it is. He couldn't stand the idea that it was there for the

taking and he couldn't get his hands on it. Now he has it. Maybe now we'll all have some peace. It's all in the name of love. (165)

Karodia's attitude articulates the courage of Dadima to weigh all her options and for a greater good, sacrifice what is important to her. Karodia acknowledges that a tangible price is sometimes required for decisions made, and she uses Dadima to portray that for her personal integrity and that of her family, it was important to reject what her son could pull them all into.

And in the same narrative, from the perspective of Ali, Karodia depicts a lifestyle and a religion that is decidedly exclusionist in its relationship with others. Although Ali had chosen to distance himself from his father and make choices outside of his consent he still encountered dissenting views and conflicting situations, "My marriage to Zarina had been opposed right from the start. Most of the objections were based on the fact that she was a divorcee and, on top of it all, she was a coloured" (117). That she was four years older than Ali and had a five-year old daughter did little to quell his mother's lack of tolerance:

In their view this 'coloured girl' from Durban, divorced and with a child, had cast a spell over me. The fact that Zarina was four years older than I, had merely confirmed their suspicions and had reinforced the myth about a divorced woman and her sexual appetites. (120)



Even the fact that Zarina converted to Islam did not make her any more acceptable. Ali's mother grieves and bemoans her son's decision to 'ruin his life':

The thought of someone turning Muslim, just so that she could marry her son, was totally unacceptable. That night as her anguish surfaced, she cried out, begging for an end to her pain. 'Better that I be dead', she moaned, 'than to go through all of this pain.' (121)

Karodia takes this a step further to illustrate that this is not merely a mother's inability to let go of her son but that it is an attitude shared by the community. The marriage of their son to a Christian girl is a topic of discussion and gossip in its level of unacceptability:

Jamila [Ali's sister] had told me that there was an atmosphere of grieving in the house, as if there had been another death. Friends and family who had heard the news came to commiserate with Ma, who was lying in bed, unable to move as if paralysed by her sorrow ... It was a familiar scene of friends and neighbours, sharing each other's heartache. They had come to pour out their sympathy for Ma, who had lost her remaining son to a coloured girl. (120)

And finally, there is the conflict of an ambivalent identity. In "The Red Velvet Dress", Katrina's character articulates this ambivalence towards both her white side and her coloured side. Her coarse hair was one of the symbols of her physical

difference and the cause of recurrent pain. To this end she recruits Nellie who “agreed to help rid me of the source of my misery – my hair” (52). Upon being discovered by Katrina’s mother, Nellie is quick to regret her actions. Katrina, by contrast, is almost defiant and she takes the beating like all the other taunts:

Ma found me like this: my hair sheared off, my scalp as white and as bald as the bottom of a new-born lamb. Nellie started howling, begging for mercy even before the strap my mother had brought had touched her. When my turn came, I sobbed quietly, each lash falling on my bare buttocks with blistering accuracy. ‘*Katjie Kleurling . . .*’.(52)

Katrina rejects her own hair because it is symbolic of the non-recognition, rejection, and discrimination that she experienced throughout her childhood. Though Katrina’s world was particularly painful – the lack of parental love, the sexual abuse, the misuse of Nellie, her father’s blatant disregard for others – was all made more unbearable by the feeling that there had been happier times. She agonizes over her mother’s unrelenting rigidity:

There were times when it seemed almost as though Ma had hated me from the moment I was born. Yet, at other times, in flashes, I saw the two of us together, her warmth wrapped around me like a summer’s breath. It is hard to decide from hindsight exactly when she changed. Perhaps I was mistaken and there was never anything between us (51-52).

These emotions spoke to her subconscious mind and to those aspects of her that resisted conscious choice. It is no surprise then that the contradiction between her world and her mind would lead her to act out the desire to rid her life of her father's grievous presence.

In Katrina's eyes, her father is cruel and selfishness. Not only does he impregnate Nellie two times but when Nellie's father Piet, the coloured labourer tries to protect his daughter, he is found dead the next day. Events from here move swiftly to their tragic conclusion: the pregnant Nellie, and her family are chased from the farm, Nellie hangs herself and at the scene where Katrina and her father go to view the body, Katrina, in a moment of temporary rage, picks up her father's rifle and kills him. She is sentenced to prison for twenty-six years. Her unmanaged internal conflict had manifested itself negatively and permanently on her life.

#### **3.4.4. Karodia's Voice in her *Use of Union***

The use of union in this context refers to the values of relationship building that women seem to instinctively hone and possess. Women characteristically promote peace, love and harmony and in contrast to men, they by nature build relationships, nurture others and show an inherent respect for life. Gilligan argues that:

Women have a distinct moral language, one that emphasizes concern for others., responsibility, care and obligation, hence a moral language profoundly at odds with formal, abstract models of morality defined in terms of absolute principles, then we must take care to preserve the sphere that makes such a morality of responsibility possible and must extend its imperative to men as well. (40)

The sharing and caring is by no means the preserve of women alone and its occurrence in narratives does not necessarily reflect a woman's voice. Male authors equally are able to nurture and identify with others, though these traits are often auxiliary to – and can be deficient from – their nature. Hence, the principles of union (Jacey 15), - the focus on intimacy, love and the dynamics of relationship – if not always expressing a woman's voice, do undeniably reflect a feminine orientation.

The principles of union influence Karodia's storytelling from her characterization to her choices of genre. One character that strongly epitomizes the healing and mending of relationships is Katrina's Aunt, Tante in "The Red Velvet Dress." Katrina had been rejected by her own mother and society at large for having murdered her 'father' who had abused both her and her only friend. Katrina emerges from a 26- year jail term to a lonely life with agonizing questions still about her identity. It is Tante who gives Katrina a chance to redefine her life,

“I am touched by the way Tante fusses about me. I can’t remember anyone ever doing anything special for me. My only recollection of Ma is that of disciplinarian: a dispenser of punishment and pain” (51).

It is Tante who dares to finally reveal the unspoken truth that had been kept from Katrina by the important people in her life. In order to protect themselves, they – her mother, her father, the church, and society – had made Katrina, the most vulnerable of them, into the sacrificial lamb to ensure personal survival. Katrina’s psychological damage is evident from the intense headaches she endures and the memories of her past that continue to torment her decades later:

The cold emptiness still grips me and I have nothing to say... I remain outside, alone and totally overwhelmed. My head pounds. It feels as if nails have been driven into my skull. I squeeze my eyes shut, shrinking into the darkness where I have always found refuge. But today there is no sanctuary from my terror. The darkness is filled with demons beating their wings inside my head. Out of this evil darkness a familiar refrain surfaces. At first muffled and distant, it becomes louder, more persistent until it drowns out all else... The rejection of my classmates is agonizing.

(50)

It is the taunting and bullying of her classmates, and the rejection of society because of her difference, that still wounds deeply. The author makes effective use of union in this instance by giving direction to Katrina's healing process. Without the love and nurturing from a trusted confidante, Katrina's ability to face her doubts and find balance is uncertain. This dilemma is resolved through relationship: the simplicity and reassurance of love cannot be over emphasised in its effectiveness and Karodia speaks of the eternal power of love to provide reconciliation in the face of trauma.

The dynamics of relationships is evident also in "Billy". When Rose finds herself at the mercy of ill health and a merciless economy, she yearns for answers for her retarded son's future. Again the author introduces the feminine quality of trust as an option and a solution to the older woman's predicament. Where all man-made institutions had proven hostile and unreliable, friendship and human compassion, that transcends age, race and class, gives Rose the reassurance that somehow, her son and her husband will manage without her. Her faith – yet another trait emerging from female territory – in the forces of good, fills her with an inner peace and strength.

Karodia's use of union can similarly be discerned in her choice of genre. Usually genre analysis is about the categorization of writings or what Rick Altman calls a semantic approach - a focus on the more superficial aspects of literary works that fit into a given genre. A semantic examination would point out

the character types, aesthetics, plot lines, and so on, which are common to a work of art.

The genre in question here, specifically, is strongly tied to issues of ethnicity and gender. This is the syntactic approach that takes into account the relationships between the semantic elements of the genre, or between those elements and aspects of society at large. As Karodia writes, her choice of genre is a significant indicator of the contradictory identities that are formed around black women. For example, *Other Secrets* is an autobiographical fiction: the text is permeated with extra-textual events and emotions of her personal history, as well as the inter-textual history of her fictional characters.

Karodia has created a text that is both fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction. Commenting on Karodia's choice of genre, Fainman-Frenkel states that: "in suturing the division between these two narrative genres, the author's ideas of public and private are revealed as she utilizes aspects of her personal history" (6). In essence, she applies the personal history of her characters to comment on the questions and struggles that are significant to women in society. Her characters, Meena and Yasmin, are heroes who struggle between individualism and their social belonging and Karodia in Chetty admits to using some of her personal experiences in the characterization of the sisters but says, "They are two totally different characters. But, I could link some of my experiences. Maybe they were the emotions that I felt at particular times of my

life, which I linked to the two. It is almost like a schizophrenic kind of thing with the two girls” (348).

Broadly, Karodia writes her emotions and life experiences into the two girls and this gives a personal account of a woman’s world and voice to defining womanhood. Other stories portray different and minor aspects of friendship. “Getting through the Night” makes clear reference to the one saving grace in Florah’s otherwise barren and arduous life. It is the supportive and uncomplicated friendship that she shares with her businesswoman neighbour, Doris. And in “Billy” we have the cross-racial friendship between Rose and Mrs da Silva. The wider storyline in both of these narratives revolve around the struggle for material resources necessary to survive in contemporary South Africa. The friendships testify to a reality outside of their physical circumstances: where the world is incongruent, oblivious of them and steadily disempowering, the friendships that these women form with one another create a union where “there must be a balance of power or privilege between or among the participants in the relationship. That is, the friends must be equally in and subject to each other’s power” (Koppelman 19).

Karodia’s exploration of the complexity of female friendship is an introduction of a theme that is essentially absent from the African literary history. Though it is far from a central theme for Karodia in her narratives, she shows it to be significant for women at various stages of life and under various conditions of



oppression. Karodia's definition of a female friendship, as we have seen, is depicted as valid across cultures and founded on the principle of mutual support.

If female friendship reflects women's value of relationship building, then the narrative of "In the Name of Love" with the strong patriarchal presence of the Papa, explains how the 'absence of union' can account for the predominance of strife and disunity in contemporary families. The web of family, tradition and religion inter-twined with Papa's impunity and human weakness produces the unsurprising outcome: suicidal individuals (his brother Feroz), a wife who lives in denial and a daughter who cannot sustain a marriage. Sanity, Karodia suggests, can only be maintained from a distance and this is the position the narrator takes. He chooses to create his own world with his own family:

I try not to dwell on my brother's death. Time and family of my own have helped to ease the pain, but my mother may not get over the death of her son. Callous as it may sound, I have a life of my own now and although there are still many unresolved issues between my father and me, I don't spend much time thinking about him. (115)

Ali does not expect the Hajj to change his father or his mother but he is ever willing to hope and forgive his father where forgiveness is sought. The title choice – "In the Name of Love" – speaks of this yielding attitude. These words are spoken

by Ali's grandmother when she gives in to Papa's greed for the family property. In exasperation she gives him what he wants in order to free the family of strife:

‘It's all right, my boy. What is money to me, anyway? I can't take it with me and your father will not have a moment of peace until he has it all. He's been wanting to take the property for years. He knows how valuable it is. He couldn't stand the idea that it was there for the taking and he couldn't get his hand on it. Now he has it. Maybe now we'll all have some peace. It's all in the name of love.’ (165)

Finally, in her choice of character we perceive a radical feminist statement in “Crossmatch” of Karodia's position on sexual orientation. The writer presents a male Hindu, Dilip, who must keep his true sexual identity a secret from his parents and the community at large. It is the liberal female protagonist, Sushi, who is compassionate towards his predicament because of the constant requirement for her to conform. Under their new constitution, South Africa is the first country in the world to include a sexual orientation clause in its Bill of Rights (Section 8, Part II).

Yet, ironically, even with the new Constitution, rights to protect homosexuals from social injustices do not exist (Graziano 14) and there have been calls to criminalize same-sex behaviour.

Indeed, when gay men and lesbians are acknowledged in literature, argued Murray and Roscoe (18), their meaning and cultural significance are discounted and minimized. Karodia in her treatment of this issue presents us with a character who is the potential suitor for our female protagonist, Sushi. To the delight of Sushi who wanted nothing to do with her parents' efforts to see her married, the knowledge that Dilip himself had no interest in marriage, was beyond relief. She discusses the situation with her sister:

Come off it, Indira. Why do you find it so hard to believe that a Hindu boy can be gay? ...I can imagine what it going to be like when his parents find out ...Sushi lay awake in the darkness, thinking about Dilip. It was going to be a shock to her parents when she told them the truth about him. (113-4)

By negating the possibility of a 'match', Karodia portrays the predicament of the two young adults as comparable, neither to be condemned more than the other, and each causing pain and anguish to the parents. On issues of identity and personal choice, Karodia's elevates the individual quest for expression over that of the group. Perhaps after years of identification through the group, she exalts the exploring Being to begin with the quest for personal truth.

Returning to our opening statement by Ann Jones, we tie up the purpose for which Karodia highlights the use of union in women interactions. Gilligan

suggests that “women’s inner lives are more complex than men’s, and that women have a greater ability to identify with others in sustaining personal relationships and attaining authentic reciprocity in those relationships”(12). This leads to a question posed by Elshatian in protecting the space of ‘union’: “what would be lost if the private sphere erodes further or if we seek to alter our intimate relations entirely?” (620). She suggests that women need a form of public discourse that protects their fragile and vulnerable existence – standing firm against cries of “emotional” – yet creating the conditions for it to flourish as a political activity. This would signal a feminist move towards viewing those who, as Elshatian further observes, are ‘other’ as “ends-in-themselves rather than simply pawns in the game or enemies in the war” (620). The question arising from this and to which the next chapter shall give attention is: How do we set about creating a feminist discourse that rejects domination? (620).

### **3.5. An Assessment of Karodia’s Voice**

Where the nature of apartheid oppression had been universal and apparent, the new challenges facing black women were of a dissipated nature and varied across the board depending on race, class and now even gender. One implication of this analysis is that instead of highlighting gender inequality as the site of sexual difference, the space that women writers must occupy is that of providing perspective of a world imagined differently. The journeys undertaken by her women protagonists are by nature private and interior – unlike writings of the

apartheid era where women wrote to be heard and remembered. This is clearly evident in Karodia's choice of characters and conflict.

The stream of consciousness of her characters is not unitary but as her narratives testify, the responses of her characters to the situations are individual and personal. By enacting the inner struggles of her characters, Karodia runs the risk of portraying her women as passive in their response, of them eventually collapsing under the pressures of their existence. Occasionally, the use of union is reflected in voices of resistance and the voice of survivors. Murray insists that to learn to speak in a "unique and authentic voice, women must 'jump outside' the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own frame" (134). Murray further goes to say that "a system of oppression draws much of its strength from the acquiescence of its victims, who have accepted the dominant image of themselves and are paralyzed by a sense of helplessness" (106). Therefore, constructed knowledge of self emerges from the struggle to replace controlling images with self-defined knowledge essential to Black women's survival.

For example, in order to survive, Black women have often had to take their oppression in silence (Karodia in "Red Velvet Dress, A Chance Encounter"). And in their silence they watch. This "watching" generates a dual consciousness in them, one in which Black women, as Lorde points out: "become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection" (114). From this vantage point, black women then

resist by doing something that “is not expected” giving evidence of their rejection of the controlling images imposed upon them.

The characters of Katrina in “The Red Velvet Dress” and Lalitha in “A Chance Encounter” both exhibit this ‘watchfulness’, the former observing her father as he molested Nellie, her only friend. Katrina, herself, had accepted his ‘love’ and ‘kindnesses’ as a child until she began to suspect that it was not an appropriate expression from a father. Combined with the rejection she experienced from her mother and her community, it all became part of the controlling image that was intended to confirm her worthlessness. For Lalitha, in “A Chance Encounter”, the faces of her oppressors were in the form of her father and Mr. Davis (and the women behind each of them), who were both well-intentioned but lacking in the moral courage to protect her from being ostracized because she was different. Katrina and Lalitha each resist by doing the unexpected, indicative that their silence did not mean submission. Patricia Collins states that: “when combined, these individual acts of resistance suggest that a distinctive collective Black women’s consciousness exists ... (and that) silence is not to be interpreted as submission in the collective, self-defined Black women’s consciousness” (98).

This analysis of definition of self, therefore, will attempt to account for the voices of resistance and voices that reveal themselves as those of survivors and not of victims. Womanist criticism as Patricia Collins observes, “has long explored this private, hidden space of Black women’s consciousness, the “inside”

ideas that allow Black women to cope with and, in many cases, transcend the confines of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender and sexuality” (98).

### **3.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter set out to locate Karodia’s voice through the conditions she creates for women as well as in her forms of expression. In the context of womanist theory, the analysis looked at the discourse on black women presented in Karodia’s texts that serves the author’s purposes of inventing woman. This was attempted by analyzing her texts for the use she makes of the structural devices of character choice, choice of world, the use of conflict and the use of union. This allowed for a revealing insight into the writer’s values and attitudes about women’s lives.

Having identified features of the writer’s voice, the final analytical chapter will attempt to identify how Karodia peculiarly invents woman by creating discourse that breaks from imposed thought in order to re-describe experience and social reality.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

*A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.*

**Max Planck**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Bell Hooks, a cultural critic, posits that texts that focus on the construction of self and identity serve to “break new ground”. They do this by naming the ways structures of domination oppress and make it virtually impossible for black women to survive and become subjects if they do not, as Hooks argues: “engage in meaningful resistance on some level” (50). This chapter aims to identify how Karodia’s use of language informs change by breaking away from imposed thought to allow for unique expression that liberates. This is tied to the third objective of this study. Most specifically, we will critically enquire into resistance forms in Karodia’s voice that rejects domination and brings about change in light of the nature and meaning of feminist discourse. An observation that concurs with Elshatian as he queries: “How do feminists re-describe experience and social reality in order to reflect on what makes this reality and experience what it currently is, whether what is must be, or whether dramatic alterations are either



possible or desirable? And what models for emancipatory speech are available?” (605).

This chapter will also analyse how Karodia’s texts serve as a critical re-centring and examination of the challenges faced by women in their attempts to achieve and maintain wholeness in a society where liberation is manifestly gendered.

#### **4.2 Need for Social Change**

We have, from examples of Karodia’s works, revealed that the unifying factor for women, essentially, is oppression on all levels – though it affects each in different ways. To this, Ann Jones stresses:

If we can translate *feminite* [female discourse] into a concerted attack not only on language, but also directly upon the socio-sexual arrangements that keep us from our own potentials and from each other – then we are on our way to becoming “les jeunes nees” [reborn]. (261)

In other words, feminine discourse seeks not only physical liberation from chains that oppress, but also emancipation from imposed thoughts to allow for unrestrained reflection. The product of such reflection, according to Foucault is the very essence of social change. Foucault asserts that, “There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and

perceive differently than one sees is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all” (8).

Karodia highlights the importance of defining that which merits change by giving voice to stories that had previously been told by others, and, adding on to that, realities that are sometimes difficult to hear. Her vivid depictions of women in positions of social constraints in a variety of hierarchical settings points to the writer’s particular fascination toward an alternative thought system.

Ross Turner uses the analogy of an alien female planted amongst humans, making objective observations of the position of women in our society. Turner uses that empty slate to reframe woman’s existence and suggest the nature of the change that must inevitably occur. In her estimation, what is evident is that woman in our society is an intruder peeking into what is said or written by and for males. This plays into the larger picture of mankind pulling the strings of inventing language and passing it on to their sons, leaving woman to take on the invisibility assigned to her. Woman’s stance, consequently, is that of fighting assumptions of her self as an outsider as well as fighting to be seen for her general, rather than her sexual characteristics.

Rosa Turner’s treatise on female invisibility underpins that women’s identification with men is tenuous in that sometimes women form part of the group called ‘men’ while at other times they are excluded:

Male-marked words, which slip back and forth between designating only males and designating all human beings, have never given an adequate reflection of social reality. Our vision has been refracted through male lenses. But even granted the truth of unquestioned male dominance, it is impossible to maintain any longer that the invisibility of females, as indicated by our generic terms, reflects present social conditions. (248)

Indeed, women writers have understood that the only way to comprehend how this ‘imbalance’ could have passed unquestioned for so long is by recognizing the reality that woman is actually considered “human-not-quite-human” (Sayers, 11). And being deemed less than human helps explain their invisibility: the way language has been used “dictates that every woman who plays an independent role be seen each time as a new exception” (Turner, 247). Turner gives the instance of isolated woman who because she is creative and aggressive is presumed not truly a woman. And the polarized language available (“master” and “mistress”) does not allow her to be described naturally, as Turner Points out:

This female invisibility, which is built into the way our language has been used, dictates that every woman who plays an independent role be seen each time as a new exception ... When each individual woman must re-fight the same battle -- that she is always the exception -- males can utilize as a powerful tool in their

retention of power the languages' insistence that she is by her very nature an exception. (248)

The question that presents is: How can black women writers present the reality of social conditions through their writings? How can language cease its reflection of visible women fighting solitary battles as the exceptions forever?

#### **4.3. Feminist Discourse**

This section seeks to explore Karodia's works for the feminist discourse that encourages women writers to use language creatively and in alternative ways in order to bring about change in their interactions and the way women view themselves. Like any black female writer hoping to bring about change, this investigation hopes to identify Karodia's writings as part of the project of rational speech, an eyes-open, truth-telling passion against "the powers that be" and "the censors within," which can be one emancipatory window into the future (Elshatian 605). For Farida Karodia writing during and after apartheid meant interpreting the black woman's experience largely in the context of the wider Black Nationalist movement. The route to liberation for women was intended to arise through the emphasis on community and ultimately, a revolutionary future that stressed stability and solidarity.

The reality of liberation, however, is more in tandem with the view of Davis who asserts that “liberation itself is often gendered” (26). The implications of this nuanced phrase, for our purposes, are twofold: firstly, that the grand liberation was a male-driven agenda of which black women recognized a collective interest and rallied accordingly. The second implication of a gendered liberation is that with the ending of apartheid, the need of liberation for women was decidedly in its infancy stages, and as this study has proposed, the authentic concerns of women had now only begun to be imagined and voiced. Women were ‘on their own’, so to speak.

The voice of Karodia, thus far, has revealed this alternate reality where nation-building occurs by means of discussing the relationships between black men and women and addressing the specific realities of black women’s lives (see Chapter Three) – beyond the sexism they endure and the restricted roles that women play in public life. This level of engagement with sexual oppression alone, however, is inadequate to bring about meaningful change in women’s lives, for according to Lorde the language used to bring woman into existence must be challenged:

The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is

only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support (67)

Lorde points to the need for feminist discourse to engage in speech that seeks power to transform the world, as well as the human subject. It must embrace a political language that moves the subject into the world without locking her into the terms of ongoing social arrangements. More importantly, though, this source of support should look different to anything used in “the master’s house”: Black women writers have the extraordinary capacity of drawing from the resources of the ‘master’ while constructing a structure of their own to contain resources to define situations yet to be uttered.

Inventing of woman here is a twofold goal: it is about the construction of meaning through the “reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us” (Lorde 68) and secondly, it is the frightening act of self-revelation which allows for “the transformation of silence into language and action” and allows for “the visibility without which we cannot truly live” (Lorde 68).

#### **4.4. Interactionism**

This section will consider the concept of social change as viewed by Interactionists who focus on small-scale interaction rather than that of society as a whole. This perspective explores the processes by which feminist discourse can seek to understand the action between men and women to bring about meaningful

change that impact positively on women's lives while improving society. Because interactionism is concerned with action between individuals, this perspective seeks to understand and explain this process. This requires an interpretation of the meanings the actors give to their activities – meanings that are not fixed entities. Interpretation of situations – the ultimate influencer of actions – depends, to an extent, on how others perceive one and how one sees oneself. For this reason, interactionists place particular emphasis on the idea of the self and the need to develop a self concept, hence the term looking glass self coined by Cooley (qtd. in Coser 17). This perspective is useful to this study in that black women have consistently been defined by others and consequently they tend to see themselves in such light and act accordingly.

This concern of defining situations and self relates to the process by which those definitions are constructed. This is most pertinent to the central investigation of invention in this study. In seeking new self-perceptions for black women, the central question we pose is 'how does change happen'? The answer to this question involves an investigation of the construction of meaning in interaction processes. This requires an analysis of the way actors interpret the language, gestures, appearance and manner of others and their interpretation of the context in which the interaction takes place. Finally, it is important to mention that definitions can also occur after a process of negotiation. The application of this theory to this study is based on the premise that definitions and meanings are constructed in interaction situations by a process of negotiation.

Karodia, for example, specifically foregrounds the challenges that oppression poses to women's subjectivity, identity and understanding of self. As a writer, she depicts women in social environments that marginalize their experiences through abuse and victimization. In her narratives, "In the Name of Love", "The Red Velvet Dress" in *Other Secrets*, Karodia brings out the need to confront issues of rape, sexual molestation, incest, and domestic violence in the move toward challenging and shedding light on what it means to construct revolutionary change for women.

While in the above mentioned texts the violence against women is male against female, in "A Chance Encounter", the female character of Lalitha finds herself at the mercy of two abusive and unwelcoming females because the child represents a threat of sorts: She is chased from her father's home because she was conceived of a relationship that he had with another woman. Hence, the child was endangered, "My wife says she has the eyes of a witch. She is frightened of the child ...I can't leave her alone with my wife for fear that she will beat her" (122-3). With that explanation, the girl is forced upon a white neighbour in the hope that they could care for her, but his self-conscious wife would have none of it: "Are you daft, Andrew? She can't stay with us. How are we going to explain this child's presence in our home...? ... Margaret was visibly relieved when the girl ran away" (125).

A product of an extra-marital relationship, Lalitha is of mixed race which renders her as other on several counts. The challenge this situation poses to her



identity and understanding of self is what leads to her choosing to exit that world in search of any one or anything that could support her personal transformation. How she ultimately negotiates this desired state of self is not a part of the plot, and we meet her only at the end of the narrative when she is full grown, with a career and independent purpose to her life. How could such a transformation have occurred?

But even more significant is the effects that these changes has on others, in particular, the protagonist. When Andrew meets the new and transformed Lalitha, he recognizes an individual who, unlike him, had refused to allow the circumstances of the past to define her. Finding himself in a new South Africa, divorced and without an anchor, meeting Lalitha directed him to salvage the relationship with his own daughter and shake off the incapacitating ghosts of the past:

It was as though the chance encounter with Lalitha had catapulted his past to centre stage. He felt a strong compulsion to speak to Justine ... The encounter with Lalitha was like a pebble dropped into the pool of his subconscious, the ripples fanning out in concentric circles. He tried to shake himself free of the past. He had to deal with the present ... It was as though meeting Lalitha had in some mysterious way connected the void between past and present. (130-131)

When it comes to change at the personal level and personal transformation, Foucault understood this evolution to have its origins in thought and individual action which occurred within existing power relations. He saw attempts to change the world on a large scale as possible only through individuals changing their personal actions and performances. However, as concerns how individual practices might change dominant discursive practices, Foucault remains vague as Lloyd argues in Markula and Pringle (6). In other words as Elshatian argues, “while Foucault can help explain Lalitha’s thought processes that positively influenced her own personal actions and performances, his theory only offers vague ideas on how her life had the ability to transform the actions of another human being and ultimately change dominant discursive practices” (219).

The sociological perspective of Interactionists becomes useful to help explain this type of change. For interactionist, meanings are not fixed entities but depend in part on the context of the interaction. That the definition of a situation may be confirmed, modified or changed depending on the individual’s perception of the interaction taking place is most significant. Karodia perceives this feature to be the window of opportunity for herself as a writer: through the dilemmas that her characters face, she portrays them as deriving particularized interpretation of the meanings of their conditions.

#### **4.5. Rhetorical Invention: Breaking Women's Constraints**

This section will investigate how Karodia uses language to remove barriers and stereotypes to re-invent black women who have been constrained to be less than whole people. We argue that the freedom to express controversial ideas is essential to women writers, since one means of removing gender ties is through language which allows communication options to remain open.

#### **4.6 Double Binds**

Black women have had much to overcome. Besides being defined as non-essential elements and physically and mentally limited (Kaseman 19), they perpetually find themselves driven by competing expectations. More precisely, women find themselves curtailed by religion, social myth, historical tradition and even self imprisoned submission. Former American First Lady, Rosalyn Carter noted that women will be condemned no matter what – an inescapable truism. Yet it is through acknowledging the truth in this statement that it is possible for one to realize liberation and be one's self.

To this, Jamieson offers the concept of the double bind to show how women who are reduced to victims and denied a rightful space to achieve are empowered and given hope. This occurs by firstly recognizing how institutionalized language limits them and secondly, by presenting the need to counter communicate. Jamieson identifies a double bind as a situation where one is faced with two restrictions, seemingly related and opposite but in which

following either prescription creates a negative outcome. One such example is ‘femininity or competence’: a fuller statement would be ‘women can be feminine, which is culturally considered weak. Thus, strong women are not feminine’. Such double binds, of which she discusses five, are faced by women both professionally and personally. The most constructive thought to be emphasized, though, is that the binds can be placed on women not only by powerful others with whom they have relationships, but are also self-imposed because they internalize societal and cultural restrictions. Described below are Jamieson’s five double binds of which when either is followed, the outcome for the individual is harmful. They are, reproduction or intellect; silence or shame; youth or helplessness; femininity or competence; and different (from men) or the same.

Karodia strongly brings out two of these double binds in her works. In the narrative “Crossmatch”, we encounter the ‘reproduction or intellect’ bind in the composite characters of the two sisters, Indira and Sushi who in their very natures are opposites:

Indira had always been good at hiding her emotions. They were so different, the two girls, both in looks and in temperament: Indira the pretty child with the endearing shyness; Sushi the wilful one disconcertingly frank. Her large intelligent eyes fixed one with their bold gaze, with intensity, always challenging. (87)

Consequently, Indira, the older sister had not pursued education, had dutifully entered an arranged marriage, was expecting her second child and, for all intents and purposes, unhappy. Sushi was educated, a successful actor and single – to her parents chagrin. They wanted her to abandon her work and settle down in marriage. Instead, Sushi was hiding the horrible fact that she was not only living with a man, but an Englishman at that. It was a secret she had to keep from her parents at all costs:

It wasn't so much the fear of discovery which constrained her, but the energy required to deal with the commotion which would result from such discovery ... The mere possibility of a confrontation with her mother was too exhausting even to contemplate. (89)

The contrasting situation the sisters found themselves in could not better epitomize the reproduction/intellect injunction that 'Women can fulfil their biological functions (to reproduce) or they can fully develop their intellect. This is correspondingly echoed in the message to modern women that 'if you try to excel at a career outside the home you will neglect your parental duties'. Clearly, the girls' circumstances are related but opposite in nature. It is the powerful 'others' with whom they have relationships that has created their untenable positions combined with their self imposed views of what would please society.

Another double bind that Karodia presents is that of 'silence or shame'. A fuller statement of this would be that women can (and should in the traditional

sense) be silent, but in so doing they forfeit influence; in contrast women who choose not to remain silent risk shame or behave like men (in the modern sense).

This is depicted in the narrative “In the Name of Love” where the mother of Ali, the narrator, is forced to support and endure her unfaithful, lying, corrupt and drug-dealing husband. Her response is to defend him at all costs, for in her socially informed opinion, “Girls from good families do not divorce their husbands” (123). And because Ma defends her husband on all counts and chooses to blind herself to his obvious faults, she subconsciously becomes an enabler of his vices that tear the family apart. Ali recognizes her choices and its consequences:

I thought about my mother’s life and the way she had continued the farce of a happy marriage. She had accepted her life as it was, without much complaint, fulfilling the demands of wife and mother. But being the accepting wife to my father was quite different from being the acquiescent mother. (119)

Ma’s silence has long-term implications on the family: Her son Feroz dies of drug abuse, estranged from the family and harbouring deep scorn and contempt of the father. Her daughter Jamila has a poisoned marriage because Papa’s brutal interference hinders Jamila from growing out of her spoilt and self-centred ways. As Papa systematically destroys the family, Ma chooses never to speak up:

My mother, however, seemed confident that things would change. No matter what my father did, my mother always covered up for him. She managed to exaggerate her own weaknesses, to take the blame. She gave herself up to him selflessly, his tacit acceptance merely demanding more and greater sacrifice. (126)

Ma's choice of silence over the shame of speaking up is how she forfeits her ability to influence the direction of her family's destiny. Instead, she pegged her future on the powerless hope that her husband would change, rather than shame herself and the family's honour by speaking up about his apparent selfishness. There is evidence, moreover, that she knew he could not be relied on: "For all those year my mother had been putting money away, fearing that my father would one day walk out on us and leave us stranded" (171). Ma finds herself in a double bind of socially and self-imposed restrictions, as evidenced by the state of being locked in her marriage with no alternatives:

I tried to comfort her ... but nothing I said or did could stem the tears. My mother cried as I had never seen her cry before. She cried, it seemed, for all the years of unhappiness, for all the years she had stoically accepted the tragedies and the disappointment and unhappiness of her own marriage. It was as though the dam wall, holding back her misery, had finally burst. (119)

These two examples of double binds serve to illustrate the constraints that women encounter in their relationships. The third double bind that we shall briefly mention is 'youth or helplessness' which is manifested in the injunctions facing Rose in "Billy". A mother in her 70s, raising a mentally challenged son, she is confronted with her social invisibility and inability to influence the world around her to achieve a future for herself, her ailing husband and her son. Other injunctions discussed by Jamieson are femininity/competence which we already mentioned as well as; different/same from men: The implication in this instance is that when women are different from men, they are not capable of the same things as men and when women are the same as men, they receive no differential treatment from men. This last double bind is also a paradox which is a foreshadowing of the analysis of the second category of restrictions that women encounter.

#### **4.6.1 Escaping Double Binds**

Double binds, as mentioned elsewhere, result when women are or feel they are constrained to act within paradoxical frames and the outcome of any action is negative. More pertinent, analysis can help black women surmount and transcend the binds because according to Taylor and Perry, " Double binds when imposed by others, depend on the relationship, and change (or go away) as the relationship changes. We do not mean to suggest such change is easy, but it can occur" (7).



In order to transcend double binds, therefore, women must begin by confronting them through statements and speech that declare their reality. By expressing freely the ideas that create controversy in their lives, women are able to free themselves from the ties of gender. Jamieson presents the options of reframing, that is, recognizing the double bind for what it is and providing new perspectives for seeing the situation. One such example of reframing is in the narrative “In the Name of Love”. Karodia presents Ma who is silenced by her need to oblige social constraints while being simultaneously limited by her inability to imagine the freedom that speaking up could avail. For her, reframing of her situation could provide, at the very least, a personal acknowledgment that even without speaking up and being shamed, in her silence she would be free to speak the truth to herself and those she loved. Descriptions such as “imperfect marriage” and “unreliable husband” need not be oxymoronic expressions, but ones to reframe her view of a husband or the institution of marriage as all-dependable and flawless. Essentially, reframing increases women’s options by casting light on a no-win situation. Ma misses an opportunity to escape her double bind and her inability to change and grow, as a result, is apparent to the reader. Karodia here creates a direct ‘cause and effect’ situation.

The double bind presented in “Crossmatch” where choices for women are either a confining marriage dictated by society or the option of a self-fulfilling career, reframing would require both Sushi and Indira to give new perspective to what needs to be central to their existence. For Sushi, for example, her need to

pacify her parents and the cultural voice in her life is not essential. Consequently, she needs to reframe her life to reflect this reality. Indira, too, might need to confront controversial ideas disguised as truths – a husband who would have her abort their child if it is female –in order to free her self of gender ties imposed by her marriage.

Jamieson presents further concepts (mentioned in earlier chapters) that work to transcend binds. They are recovering and recounting which entails unearthing buried knowledge about female predecessors. This will ensure a past, present and future continuity and that the lives of contemporary women, as Kasema, are inspired and told:

Recovering women's lives provides a valuing of the lived parts of women's lives. Women have achieved and the experiences need to be shared. Justice has opened doors and women have flourished. Future generations of women can use existing role models to empower and broaden their possibilities. (43)

Finally, Jamieson suggest reclaiming and recasting of language that excludes females – “mankind”, “chairman”, “forefathers” and claim generic terms. Such rewriting changes perceptions in that it includes the intentional mentioning of men and women who can both be identified as participants in life events. These ideas are useful for a rethinking of the ways women can overcome barriers and provides inspirational examples experienced elsewhere.

#### 4.7 Paradoxes

In the battle to achieve liberation to be one's self, paradoxical situations in which women find themselves in can be turned to advantage. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a paradox arises when the two contradictory elements that seemingly cancel each other out both have sufficient "truth" that neither can be dismissed. One such example is the statement, "I am a liar" which is a paradox because if the statement is true, it must be false and if it is false, it must be true. Paradoxes, unlike double binds, according to Jamieson, are not susceptible to change by one's actions (4). Rather, they persist in spite of actions. While double binds are imposed by others and depend on the relationship, paradoxes, in contrast, do not go away depending on our behaviours.

In our study of Karodia's voice, we seek to explore how recognizing – and acting upon – contradictory truths can open new understandings of women's experiences and communication about women. In her narrative "Getting through the Night", Karodia takes the reader on a journey of one night in the life of Rose, a single mother living in a South African township. Rose has two contradictory realities in her life; the first is that she has to work unreasonable hours for miserable pay that does not allow her to meet the material needs of herself and her daughter, "It was an interminable struggle to survive. It was a struggle to eat, to pay the rent, to find a job, to educate the children and to buy the few necessities that would make life a little easier" (80).

Consequently, she is not able to establish the moral authority and control over her daughter's development and future, leading to the second contradiction: This is that her role of mother is central to her existence, yet her obligation to provide does not permit her to be an effective mother to her daughter. Instead, she ends up alienating her daughter:

...Tandi had grown away from her, had put up barriers between them. The antagonism was not the result of normal tensions between mother and daughter; there were times when Florah sensed that Tandi's resentment ran much deeper. It was as though Tandi had blamed her for everything that had gone wrong in her life. Florah was hurt by the rudeness and the complete disregard with which Tandi sometimes treated her ... Florah occasionally also felt resentful about the way things had turned out, especially about the way she had to raise Tandi by herself. (78)

Florah's case is a prototype of many women's experiences. Many black women can relate similar thoughts, whether about family, work or partners. Paradox is a far more common and prevalent experience that touches the ordinary and the influential. An investigation into the facts in Florah's case merely confirms the contradictions.

Karodia presents a second paradox in the life of Sissi, or Doctor Sibusisiwe Gumede, in "Against an African Sky". A native girl, who worked on a

white farm, she was rescued from a fate that awaited all African females, “ Native girls get married early. Some boy will come along and give her a new dress, and she’ll go off with him ...She’ll probably give herself to the first boy who buys her a present. Then she’ll leave the farm and breed his children” (16). Instead, Sissie received an education through the white matriarch of the farm and soldiered on to acquire two medical degrees. Ideally, her education provided her new authority as the narrator observes, “You have the clout now, Sissie. You can use your influence with the powers-that-be (40). On the one hand her life had been transformed by her exposure and she did exercise her capacity to influence:

Sissie, who had brought along her medical bag, spent her time in the labourers’ quarters, examining the children and providing treatment where necessary. It’s a good way ... to find my way back into a community I deserted so long ago.” (40)

This truth is set against the fact that in Sissie’s experience, education at that level did not necessarily translate to influence for a black woman. There were forces that would stand in her way:

Because I’m a woman some of my black colleagues patronise me. Yet, they consider themselves thoroughly modern. I often have to stop them, to say: Hey, *Wetu*, don’t treat me like that! ...  
Sometimes it makes me so damn mad. But what can one do?

There's no point complaining, is there? We just have to get in there and change things. I've had a bellyful of "attitude". My husband had this problem too. He was just as chauvinistic. (40-41)

Sissi's situation is paradoxical in that she sought education to be able to influence, but finds that the education itself provides the limitations to that influence. And this was not confined to the urban setting:

But it wasn't as easy to break through the reserve as she had expected. Few of the labourers had ever encountered a doctor. And while the women regarded her with awe, men were suspicious ...  
 "I have to fight my way into rural communities. The old ways die hard ... So many people still believe in traditional healers." (40)

#### **4.7.1 Living with Paradoxes**

L'Engle in "Two Part Invention: The Story of a Marriage" states that:

The world of science lives fairly comfortably with paradox. We know that light is a wave, and also that light is a particle. The discoveries made in the infinitely small world of particle physics indicate randomness and chance, and I do not find it any more difficult to live with the paradox of a universe of randomness and chance and a universe of pattern and purpose than I do with light as a wave and light

as a particle. Living with contradiction is nothing new to the human being. (501)

When actual paradox exists as described in the coexistence of two contradictory concepts, efforts at finding ‘what the facts are’ has meaningful implications. And such efforts are directly linked to a great deal of progress, much change in women’s lives and will continue to be so. Two responses, suggested by Wood and Conrad (19), are useful to our argument of living with paradoxes. The first is *perpetuating* responses, which includes attempting to accept both sides by alternating between each truth. This inability to hold such contradictory truths in our minds leads to another perpetuating behaviour, withdrawal, which can be both immobilizing and even suicide-inducing (Taylor and Perry, 9).

Their observation is that it “can create untenable positions in which one cannot exist for long periods of time without some personal, professional, or emotional consequences (8). Florah experiences this withdrawal in her perceived ineffectiveness:

It takes too much to live, Florah thought. It takes too much determination, it takes too much effort, too much endurance. It had worn her out. Sometimes she felt like stretching out on the bed and holding her breath until she quietly slipped away. A painless death would be preferable to the constant paralysis caused by fear. (84)

The second reaction to living with paradox as suggested by Taylor and Perry is the idea of *transcendent* responses, which involves re-conceptualization, to change how basic ideas are defined into existence.

To this, Hong Kingston observes that bringing one's thought patterns to encompass contradictory "truths" enlarges the potential meanings embedded in any event and helps expand our consciousness. This is in opposition to the detrimental outcomes that transpire when black women live surrounded by paradox (e.g. Florah's case), or in the lie of one or the other side of the proposition. The generative power of paradox lies, rather in the need to acknowledge how both parts of the paradox is accurate simultaneously and in its contradiction.

This is exemplified in the claim that woman is powerless – when paired with man – that exists side by side with a contradictory fact that woman is powerful. The character of Sissie in her willingness to fight perceptions and yet take pride in what she had become helps us better understand how disabilities constitute both weakness and strength. Wrapping one's mind around these statements contributes insight into the many levels of interacting meaning that exist when humans communicate within paradoxical constructions. Karodia does not unrealistically depict her or her other women characters as successfully escaping double binds and triumphantly living with paradoxes. In several instances when faced with a true paradox her creative response is to allow her characters to embrace it and replace the either/or with both/and. Recognizing



contradictory truths can open new understanding of black women's experiences and communication.

#### **4.8 An Assessment of Karodia's Transformative Language**

We return to the notion widely accepted that those in power have a greater prospect to force their views of social reality, and to the yet contentious view that all language, including the language of theory, must serve only the dominators.

Elshatian is particularly lucid as to how such changes to social practices transpire:

Meanings evolve slowly as changing social practices, relations, and institutions are characterized in new ways. Over time this helps to give rise to an altered reality, for language evolution is central to reality. Speech that seeks power to transform the world, as well as the human subject, must embrace a political language that moves the subject into the world without locking her into the terms of ongoing social arrangements. (615-16)

This analysis of Karodia on matters of gender and language heightens the importance of seeing the mind-enlarging functions of double binds and paradox. Gender-wise, humans are at once masculine and feminine, the same and different. This is a useful construction of woman as a constantly changing entity that emerges from relationships. By simultaneously holding multiple contradictory

truths in one's mind, women "are better equipped to understand, use, and live with them all" (Taylor and Perry 8).

#### **4.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter aimed to show Karodia's language characterized in a new way, in order to exhibit black women's realities as evolving and transformed. Through the use of Interaction theory and women's need for change, the textual analysis of Karodia's writings revealed two such new ways of using language to alter reality.

First is the double bind that shows the writer's awareness of restrictive situations in women's lives. These can be changed only by stating their reality and giving expression to the ideas that create controversy in their lives. This also provides new perspective on the situation and frees women from ties of gender. Other means of transcending double binds includes the use of history and language to include women and help them overcome barriers.

The second use of speech that transforms is the recognizing of paradoxes or contradictory truths in women's lives to open new understandings of their experiences. These situations are usually not susceptible to change, but recognizing and acting upon them opens new avenues for women's progress by recognizing both the strengths and weaknesses that allows for insight.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

This chapter summarizes the findings for the study and their implications for the general understanding of feminist criticism. Specifically, the chapter outlines, in detail, all the conclusions of this study and significantly those that are related to the objectives and research questions that this study set out to answer.

The first objective of this study was to determine how the black woman's socio-historical position rendered her invisible and created the need for her to distinguish her voice from other dominant voices. The investigation set out to give context to the black woman's invisibility in the South African literary tradition. The findings revealed that there were many constraints for black writers under apartheid that were not unique to black women. Black men and women similarly experienced harassment by the state, academic hegemony over literature, restraints of resources, prejudice of critics, racism, and a preponderance of western literary codes. It was the largely white academia that continues to determine what literature is; while publishing houses decide how value should be appropriated.

For black women writers, however, there were further causes of marginalisation and exclusion from the literary scene. Because women were traditionally subordinate to men, their subjugated role was emphasised with the

coming of the colonial settlers and later the establishment of apartheid. They found themselves under the triple oppressions of race, class and sex. This rendered black women powerless outside the home and with limited opportunities for education.

Apartheid conditions ensured the woman was tied to the home and strapped down by the concerns of basic survival for the family. Woolf is famously known to have said that “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4). It was the absence, therefore, of these socio-economic freedoms that made self-expression a near impossibility for many black women and rendered them invisible.

Karodia herself, in a July 2000 interview with Chetty (2), speaks about the influence of the three decades of exile on her writing and acknowledges that had she not gone into exile, she might never have written. It was only the opportunities available in Canada and the strong feelings ignited by “despair of living abroad” that inspired her to write. And even then, the challenge became the absence of a literary tradition upon which black women writers could draw upon in their use of language and their portrayal of women.

How then did these conditions create the need for a distinct voice? The findings revealed that when the opportunity availed itself in a secure post-apartheid environment not infringed upon by others, black women writers who had the inherent desire to write could now do so. Many artists, who had been muted by the hostile conditions of the state and hindered by countless others, now

realized they no longer had to keep silent and could rightfully put their names to their thoughts.

When black women read literatures written by others, they found their experiences un-represented nor did the stories written about them portray their realities. This gave rise, hence, to the need to convey the average woman's narrative and record stories of other obscure lives. Many women have accounts yet to be narrated. The black woman writer can now interpret her world for others to read, free of the immediacy of emotion generated by the past.

The second objective set out to establish how Karodia makes distinct the female conditions of her characters and how this is reflected in her style. The inquiry set out to establish the social concerns of the black woman in the post-apartheid dispensation as depicted by the writer. The black female writing in this instance was contrasted with the longer established male tradition as we asserted that the gauge for assessing black women writers should be different from that used for male writers. Our finding was that black women writers need to be assessed by their effectiveness in portraying black women's experiences. A womanist perspective, in this instance, became useful in linking feminine conditions to feminine forms in order to locate Karodia's voice.

The analysis of Karodia's voice – as analysed through her choice of characters, her choice of world, her use of conflict and her use of union – distinguished her both as a woman writer but also as an individual with a particular point of view towards black women. Her style revealed that her artistry

speaks into her character's lives to animate them as they confront post-apartheid issues – both social and economic – in a manner that recognizes their existence.

The third objective sought to assess Karodia's use of language for its ability to inform change by breaking away from patriarchal thought patterns and allow for unique expression that liberates the black woman. Specifically, the research question which was central to the problem of the study asked "How does Karodia create a female language that prompts self-revelation and transform silence into visibility and action?" The investigation at this stage employed a womanist framework in combination with a theory of rhetorical invention to analyse Karodia's language as it depicts woman's experience. The textual analysis of Karodia's works revealed, most importantly, her awareness of restrictive situations – double binds and paradoxes – in women's lives. By giving voice to these realities and expressing the ideas that create controversy and contradictions in their lives, a new perspective, Karodia suggests, is always achieved. In some instances, women are even able to transcend their situations and overcome barriers, but always new awareness – however limited – leads to consciousness and insight.

The findings revealed that the absence of social and economic liberties during the apartheid regime made self-expression for black women a near impossibility. The black women's literary tradition is traceable only to the early writings which began with women's autobiographical writings for those who were privileged to have access to foreign publishers. With the new freedom provided

after apartheid, black women who were positioned to write could now express themselves.

Equally important is how Karodia's portrayal of black women's experiences depicts new forms of social exclusion. Apartheid exclusions and divisions were legislated and fell into clear-cut categories. Karodia, perpetually sensitized to the marginalization of others, highlights how black women are now excluded for new and diverse reasons. She tells the narrative of those dispossessed, poor, divorced, aged, the physically handicapped and those of alternate sexual orientation – this suggests that black woman writers need to invent through the shifting of old margins and the creation of new centres. By telling the unheard stories of the marginalized she tips the equation balance that favours the traditional centre – white, rich, educated, conservative, the healthy – and negotiates a new space using language and the personal world.

Finally, this study reveals that Karodia depicts her characters as functioning in the midst of their social restrictions and constraints. By artistically and skilfully giving voice to these limitations, the writer provides hope for black women and provides a new perspective on their circumstances. Her particular interpretation of the world of double binds and paradoxes suggests that women who are victims and denied space can, conversely, be empowered and given hope.

## 5.2 Conclusions

Farida Karodia uses her voice in her writings to reflect the social changes that individuals underwent as a result of having engaged in the political struggle. The scenario provides evidence that a majority of black women underwent transition without transformation. If the objective of the resistance was to attain equitable rights, then the continued marginalization of sections of the population portends a new chapter of the struggle.

Karodia interprets the new period as an age no longer centred on the needs of the Collective – those that had regimented to fight the supremacist state – but instead as pivoting around the individual. As the new agent of social transformation, the individual is shown as confronting personal deficits and inadequacies as a means of transforming her world. Karodia's worldview highlights how relocating the site of actual change is the genesis for representing women's lives and experiences. This alternate position ties in most suitably with the concept of invention in that as women seek to shape their destinies through resisting patriarchal oppression, invention requires that they engage in the erosion of myths (using tools such as subversion) and a resistance language that exhibits a unique black femaleness.

Finally, this study further suggests that black women are not only confronted by new social realities, but from Karodia's texts, we encounter a voice that submits that new realities must find their expression in a language that



expresses possibilities of change. Consequently, Karodia reveals how personal and interpersonal change is a by-product of change in perceptions and attitudes.

### **5.3 Recommendations for further research**

Inventing women for black women writers is a multi-pronged task of acknowledging forms of exclusion that women endure, discerning the language that perpetuates it, while creating new ideas about women and formulating a language that is in tandem with that reality. This all falls under the challenge of exposing the normative discourses of patriarchy and domination. Black women's writing, however, is but one form of text. It is the recommendation of this study, therefore, that future studies need to explore various types of texts presented in the vernacular, variations of music, drama, graffiti (including the *matatu* variety), as well as non-literary and phatic forms that are part of people's every day experience. This will serve to expand the resource pool from which social awareness is raised concerning the injustices that women consciously and unconsciously endure in their quest for personal and communal liberation.

Having ventured into the arena of a language that transforms, it is the recommendation of this study that scholars, wordsmiths and experts in neo-logisms be alerted to the role they need to play in using language to reflect its ability to adapt to social change. This study has contended that new realities require new forms of linguistic expression and the degree to which language accurately reflects situations is directly proportionate to the manifestation of truth and

wholeness that permeates our lives. In other words, if innovative language is to become the tool that will interpret the new texts and forms of expression, then creators of idioms, catch phrases and buzz words must recognize both the interpretive and prophetic role that they are called to play.

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